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BY

J. M. BARRIE

PLAYS II

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

DEAR BRUTUS

MARY ROSE

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1926

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THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

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ACT I

AT LOAM HOUSE, MAYFAIR

A moment before the curtain rises, the Hon. Ernest Woolley drives up to the door of Loam House in Mayfair. There is a happy smile on his pleasant, insignificant face, and this presumably means that he is thinking of himself. He is too busy over nothing, this man about town, to be always thinking of himself, but, on the other hand, he almost never thinks of any other person. Probably Ernest's great moment is when he wakes of a morning and realises that he really is Ernest, for we must all wish to be that which is our ideal. We can conceive him springing out of bed light-heartedly and waiting for his man to do the rest. He is dressed in excellent taste, with just the little bit more which shows that he is not without a sense of humour: the dandiacal are often saved by carrying a smile at the whole thing in their spats, let us say. Ernest left Cambridge the other day, a member of the Athenæum (which he would be sorry to have you confound with a club in London of the same name). He is a bachelor, but not of arts, no mean epigrammatist (as you shall see), and a favourite of the ladies. He

is almost a celebrity in restaurants, where he dines frequently, returning to sup; and during this last year he has probably paid as much in them for the privilege of handing his hat to an attendant as the rent of a working-man's flat. He complains brightly that he is hard up, and that if somebody or other at Westminster does not look out the country will go to the dogs. He is no fool. He has the shrewdness to float with the current because it is a labour-saving process, but he has sufficient pluck to fight, if fight he must (a brief contest, for he would soon be toppled over). He has a light nature, which would enable him to bob up cheerily in new conditions and return unaltered to the old ones. His selfishness is his most endearing quality. If he has his way he will spend his life like a cat in pushing his betters out of the soft places, and until he is old he will be fondled in the process.

He gives his hat to one footman and his cane to another, and mounts the great staircase unassisted and undirected. As a nephew of the house he need show no credentials even to Crichton, who is guarding a door above.

It would not be good taste to describe Crichton, who is only a servant; if to the scandal of all good houses he is to stand out as a figure in the play, he must do it on his own, as they say in the pantry and the boudoir.

We are not going to help him. We have had misgivings ever since we found his name in the title, and we shall keep him out of his rights as long as we can. Even though we softened to him he would not be a hero in these clothes of servitude; and he loves his clothes. How to get him out of them? It would require a cataclysm. To be an indoor servant at all is to Crichton a badge of honour; to be a butler at thirty is the realisation of his proudest ambitions. He is devotedly attached to his master, who, in his opinion, has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors. We are immediately to be introduced to this solitary failing of a great English peer.

This perfect butler, then, opens a door, and ushers Ernest into a certain room. At the same moment the curtain rises on this room, and the play begins.

It is one of several reception-rooms in Loam House, not the most magnificent but quite the softest; and of a warm afternoon all that those who are anybody crave for is the softest. The larger rooms are magnificent and bare, carpetless, so that it is an accomplishment to keep one's feet on them; they are sometimes lent for charitable purposes; they are also all in use on the night of a dinner-party, when you may find yourself alone in one, having taken a wrong turning; or alone, save for two others who are within hailing distance.

This room, however, is comparatively small and very soft. There are so many cushions in it that you wonder why, if you are an outsider and don't know that it needs six cushions to make one fair head comfy. The couches themselves are cushions as large as beds, and there is an art of sinking into them and of waiting to be helped out of them. There are several famous paintings on the walls, of which you may say 'Jolly thing that,' without losing caste as knowing too much; and in cases there are glorious miniatures, but the daughters of the house cannot tell you of whom; 'there is a catalogue somewhere.' There are a thousand or so of roses in basins, several library novels, and a row of weekly illustrated newspapers lying against each other like fallen soldiers. If any one disturbs this row Crichton seems to know of it from afar and appears noiselessly and replaces the wanderer. One thing unexpected in such a room is a great array of tea things. Ernest spots them with a twinkle, and has his epigram at once unsheathed. He dallies, however, before delivering the thrust.

ERNEST. I perceive, from the tea cups, Crichton, that the great function is to take place here.

CRICHTON (*with a respectful sigh*). Yes, sir.

ERNEST (*chuckling heartlessly*). The servants' hall coming up to have tea in the drawing-room! (*With terrible sarcasm.*) No wonder you look happy, Crichton.

CRICHTON (*under the knife*). No, sir.

ERNEST. Do you know, Crichton, I think that with an effort you might look even happier. (CRICHTON *smiles wanly.*) You don't approve of his lordship's compelling his servants to be his equals—once a month?

CRICHTON. It is not for me, sir, to disapprove of his lordship's Radical views.

ERNEST. Certainly not. And, after all, it is only once a month that he is affable to you.

CRICHTON. On all other days of the month, sir, his lordship's treatment of us is everything that could be desired.

ERNEST. (*This is the epigram.*) Tea cups! Life, Crichton, is like a cup of tea; the more heartily we drink, the sooner we reach the dregs.

CRICHTON (*obediently*). Thank you, sir.

ERNEST (*becoming confidential, as we do when*

we have need of an ally). Crichton, in case I should be asked to say a few words to the servants, I have strung together a little speech. (*His hand strays to his pocket.*) I was wondering where I should stand.

(*He tries various places and postures, and comes to rest leaning over a high chair, whence, in dumb show, he addresses a gathering.* CRICHTON, *with the best intentions, gives him a footstool to stand on, and departs, happily unconscious that* ERNEST *in some dudgeon has kicked the footstool across the room.*)

ERNEST (*addressing an imaginary audience, and desirous of startling them at once*). Suppose you were all little fishes at the bottom of the sea——

(*He is not quite satisfied with his position, though sure that the fault must lie with the chair for being too high, not with him for being too short.* CRICHTON'S *suggestion was not perhaps a bad one after all. He lifts the stool, but hastily conceals it behind him on the entrance of the* LADIES CATHERINE

and AGATHA, *two daughters of the house.* CATHERINE *is twenty, and* AGATHA *two years younger. They are very fashionable young women indeed, who might wake up for a dance, but they are very lazy,* CATHERINE *being two years lazier than* AGATHA.)

ERNEST (*uneasily jocular, because he is concealing the footstool*). And how are my little friends to-day?

AGATHA (*contriving to reach a settee*). Don't be silly, Ernest. If you want to know how we are, we are dead. Even to think of entertaining the servants is so exhausting.

CATHERINE (*subsiding nearer the door*). Besides which, we have had to decide what frocks to take with us on the yacht, and that is such a mental strain.

ERNEST. You poor over-worked things. (*Evidently* AGATHA *is his favourite, for he helps her to put her feet on the settee, while* CATHERINE *has to dispose of her own feet.*) Rest your weary limbs.

CATHERINE (*perhaps in revenge*). But why have you a footstool in your hand?

AGATHA. Yes?

ERNEST. Why? (*Brilliantly; but to be sure he has had time to think it out.*) You see, as the servants are to be the guests I must be butler. I was practising. This is a tray, observe.

(*Holding the footstool as a tray, he minces across the room like an accomplished footman. The gods favour him, for just here* LADY MARY *enters, and he holds out the footstool to her.*)

Tea, my lady?

(LADY MARY *is a beautiful creature of twenty-two, and is of a natural hauteur which is at once the fury and the envy of her sisters. If she chooses she can make you seem so insignificant that you feel you might be swept away with the crumb-brush. She seldom chooses, because of the trouble of preening herself as she does it; she is usually content to show that you merely tire her eyes. She often seems to be about to go to sleep in the middle of a remark: there is quite a long and anxious pause, and then she continues, like a clock*

that hesitates, bored in the middle of its strike.)

LADY MARY (*arching her brows*). It is only you, Ernest; I thought there was some one here (*and she also bestows herself on cushions*).

ERNEST (*a little piqued, and deserting the foot-stool*). Had a very tiring day also, Mary?

LADY MARY (*yawning*). Dreadfully. Been trying on engagement-rings all the morning.

ERNEST (*who is as fond of gossip as the oldest club member*). What's that? (*To* AGATHA.) Is it Brocklehurst?

(*The energetic* AGATHA *nods.*)

You have given your warm young heart to Brocky?

(LADY MARY *is impervious to his humour, but he continues bravely.*)

I don't wish to fatigue you, Mary, by insisting on a verbal answer, but if, without straining yourself, you can signify Yes or No, won't you make the effort?

(*She indolently flashes a ring on her most important finger, and he starts back melodramatically.*)

The ring! Then I am too late, too late! (*Fixing* LADY MARY *sternly, like a prosecuting counsel.*) May I ask, Mary, does Brocky know? Of course, it was that terrible mother of his who pulled this through. Mother does everything for Brocky. Still, in the eyes of the law you will be, not her wife, but his, and, therefore, I hold that Brocky ought to be informed. Now——

(*He discovers that their languorous eyes have closed.*)

If you girls are shamming sleep in the expectation that I shall awaken you in the manner beloved of ladies, abandon all such hopes.

(CATHERINE *and* AGATHA *look up without speaking.*)

LADY MARY (*speaking without looking up*). You impertinent boy.

ERNEST (*eagerly plucking another epigram from his quiver*). I knew that was it, though I don't know everything. Agatha, I 'm not young enough to know everything.

(*He looks hopefully from one to another,*

but though they try to grasp this, his brilliance baffles them.)

AGATHA (*his secret admirer*). *Young* enough?

ERNEST (*encouragingly*). Don't you see? I 'm not young enough to know everything.

AGATHA. I 'm sure it 's awfully clever, but it 's so puzzling.

(*Here* CRICHTON *ushers in an athletic, pleasant-faced young clergyman,* MR. TREHERNE, *who greets the company.*)

CATHERINE. Ernest, say it to Mr. Treherne.

ERNEST. Look here, Treherne, I 'm not young enough to know everything.

TREHERNE. How do you mean, Ernest?

ERNEST (*a little nettled*). I mean what I say.

LADY MARY. Say it again; say it more slowly.

ERNEST. I 'm—not—young—enough—to—know—everything.

TREHERNE. *I* see. What you really mean, my boy, is that you are not old enough to know everything.

ERNEST. No, I don't.

TREHERNE. I assure you that 's it.

LADY MARY. Of course it is.

CATHERINE. Yes, Ernest, that 's it.

(ERNEST, *in desperation, appeals to* CRICHTON.)

ERNEST. I am not young enough, Crichton, to know everything.

(*It is an anxious moment, but a smile is at length extorted from* CRICHTON *as with a corkscrew.*)

CRICHTON. Thank you, sir. (*He goes.*)

ERNEST (*relieved*). Ah, if you had that fellow's head, Treherne, you would find something better to do with it than play cricket. I hear you bowl with your head.

TREHERNE (*with proper humility*). I 'm afraid cricket is all I 'm good for, Ernest.

CATHERINE (*who thinks he has a heavenly nose*). Indeed, it isn't. You are sure to get on, Mr. Treherne.

TREHERNE. Thank you, Lady Catherine.

CATHERINE. But it was the bishop who told me so. He said a clergyman who breaks both ways is sure to get on in England.

TREHERNE. I 'm jolly glad.

(*The master of the house comes in, accompanied by* LORD BROCKLEHURST. *The* EARL OF LOAM *is a widower, a philanthropist, and a peer of advanced ideas. As a widower he is at least able to interfere in the domestic concerns of his house—to rummage in the drawers, so to speak, for which he has felt an itching all his blameless life; his philanthropy has opened quite a number of other drawers to him; and his advanced ideas have blown out his figure. He takes in all the weightiest monthly reviews, and prefers those that are uncut, because he perhaps never looks better than when cutting them; but he does not read them, and save for the cutting it would suit him as well merely to take in the covers. He writes letters to the papers, which are printed in a type to scale with himself, and he is very jealous of those other correspondents who get his type. Let laws and learning, art and commerce die, but leave the big type*

to an intellectual aristocracy. He is really the reformed House of Lords which will come some day.

Young LORD BROCKLEHURST *is nothing save for his rank. You could pick him up by the handful any day in Piccadilly or Holborn, buying socks—or selling them.*)

LORD LOAM (*expansively*). You are here, Ernest. Feeling fit for the voyage, Treherne?

TREHERNE. Looking forward to it enormously.

LORD LOAM. That 's right. (*He chases his children about as if they were chickens.*) Now then, Mary, up and doing, up and doing. Time we had the servants in. They enjoy it so much.

LADY MARY. They hate it.

LORD LOAM. Mary, to your duties. (*And he points severely to the tea-table.*)

ERNEST (*twinkling*). Congratulations, Brocky.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*who detests humour*). Thanks.

ERNEST. Mother pleased?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*with dignity*). Mother is very pleased.

ERNEST. That 's good. Do you go on the yacht with us?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Sorry I can't. And look here, Ernest, I will *not* be called Brocky.

ERNEST. Mother don't like it?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She does not. (*He leaves* ERNEST, *who forgives him and begins to think about his speech.* CRICHTON *enters.*)

LORD LOAM (*speaking as one man to another*). We are quite ready, Crichton. (CRICHTON *is distressed.*)

LADY MARY (*sarcastically*). How Crichton enjoys it!

LORD LOAM (*frowning*). He is the only one who doesn't; pitiful creature.

CRICHTON (*shuddering under his lord's displeasure*). I can't help being a Conservative, my lord.

LORD LOAM. Be a man, Crichton. You are the same flesh and blood as myself.

CRICHTON (*in pain*). Oh, my lord!

LORD LOAM (*sharply*). Show them in;

and, by the way, they were not all here last time.

CRICHTON. All, my lord, except the merest trifles.

LORD LOAM. It must be every one. (*Lowering.*) And remember this, Crichton, for the time being you are my equal. (*Testily.*) I shall soon show you whether you are not my equal. Do as you are told.

(CRICHTON *departs to obey, and his lordship is now a general. He has no pity for his daughters, and uses a terrible threat.*)

And girls, remember, no condescension. The first who condescends recites. (*This sends them skurrying to their labours.*)

By the way, Brocklehurst, can you do anything?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. How do you mean?

LORD LOAM. Can you do anything—with a penny or a handkerchief, make them disappear, for instance?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Good heavens, no.

LORD LOAM. It 's a pity. Every one in

our position ought to be able to do something. Ernest, I shall probably ask you to say a few words; something bright and sparkling.

ERNEST. But, my dear uncle, I have prepared nothing.

LORD LOAM. Anything impromptu will do.

ERNEST. Oh—well—if anything strikes me on the spur of the moment.

(*He unostentatiously gets the footstool into position behind the chair.* CRICHTON *reappears to announce the guests, of whom the first is the housekeeper.*)

CRICHTON (*reluctantly*). Mrs. Perkins.

LORD LOAM (*shaking hands*). Very delighted, Mrs. Perkins. Mary, our friend, Mrs. Perkins.

LADY MARY. How do you do, Mrs. Perkins? Won't you sit here?

LORD LOAM (*threateningly*). Agatha!

AGATHA (*hastily*). How do you do? Won't you sit down?

LORD LOAM (*introducing*). Lord Brocklehurst—my valued friend, Mrs. Perkins.

(LORD BROCKLEHURST *bows and escapes. He has to fall back on* ERNEST.)

LORD BROCKLEHURST. For heaven's sake, Ernest, don't leave me for a moment; this sort of thing is utterly opposed to all my principles.

ERNEST (*airily*). You stick to me, Brocky, and I 'll pull you through.

CRICHTON. Monsieur Fleury.

ERNEST. The chef.

LORD LOAM (*shaking hands with the chef*). Very charmed to see you, Monsieur Fleury.

FLEURY. Thank you very much.

(FLEURY *bows to* AGATHA, *who is not effusive.*)

LORD LOAM (*warningly*). Agatha—recitation!

(*She tosses her head, but immediately finds a seat and tea for* M. FLEURY. TREHERNE *and* ERNEST *move about, making themselves amiable.* LADY MARY *is presiding at the tea-tray.*)

CRICHTON. Mr. Rolleston.

LORD LOAM (*shaking hands with his valet*). How do you do, Rolleston?

(CATHERINE *looks after the wants of* ROLLESTON.)

CRICHTON. Mr. Tompsett.

(TOMPSETT, *the coachman, is received with honours, from which he shrinks.*)

CRICHTON. Miss Fisher.

(*This superb creature is no less than* LADY MARY'S *maid, and even* LORD LOAM *is a little nervous.*)

LORD LOAM. This is a pleasure, Miss Fisher.

ERNEST (*unabashed*). If I might venture, Miss Fisher (*and he takes her unto himself*).

CRICHTON. Miss Simmons.

LORD LOAM (*to* CATHERINE'S *maid*). You are always welcome, Miss Simmons.

ERNEST (*perhaps to kindle jealousy in* MISS FISHER). At last we meet. Won't you sit down?

CRICHTON. Mademoiselle Jeanne.

LORD LOAM. Charmed to see you, Mademoiselle Jeanne.

(*A place is found for* AGATHA'S *maid, and the scene is now an animated one; but still our host thinks his girls are not sufficiently sociable. He frowns on* LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY (*in alarm*). Mr. Treherne, this is Fisher, my maid.

LORD LOAM (*sharply*). Your what, Mary?

LADY MARY. My friend.

CRICHTON. Thomas.

LORD LOAM. How do you do, Thomas?

(*The first footman gives him a reluctant hand.*)

CRICHTON. John.

LORD LOAM. How do you do, John?

(ERNEST *signs to* LORD BROCKLEHURST, *who hastens to him.*)

ERNEST (*introducing*). Brocklehurst, this is John. I think you have already met on the door-step.

CRICHTON. Jane.

(*She comes, wrapping her hands miserably in her apron.*)

LORD LOAM (*doggedly*). Give me your hand, Jane.

CRICHTON. Gladys.

ERNEST. How do you do, Gladys. You know my uncle?

LORD LOAM. Your hand, Gladys.

(*He bestows her on* AGATHA.)

CRICHTON. Tweeny.

(*She is a very humble and frightened kitchenmaid, of whom we are to see more.*)

LORD LOAM. So happy to see you.

FISHER. John, I saw you talking to Lord Brocklehurst just now; introduce me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*at the same moment to* ERNEST). That 's an uncommon pretty girl; if I must feed one of them, Ernest, that 's the one.

(*But* ERNEST *tries to part him and* FISHER *as they are about to shake hands.*)

ERNEST. No you don't, it won't do, Brocky. (*To* MISS FISHER.) You are too pretty, my dear. Mother wouldn't like it. (*Discovering* TWEENY.) Here 's something safer. Charming girl, Brocky, dying to know you; let me introduce you. Tweeny, Lord Brocklehurst—Lord Brocklehurst, Tweeny.

(BROCKLEHURST *accepts his fate; but he still has an eye for* FISHER, *and something may come of this.*)

LORD LOAM (*severely*). They are not all here, Crichton.

CRICHTON (*with a sigh*). Odds and ends.

(*A* STABLE-BOY *and a* PAGE *are shown in, and for a moment no daughter of the house advances to them.*)

LORD LOAM (*with a roving eye on his children*). Which is to recite?

(*The last of the company are, so to say, embraced.*)

LORD LOAM (*to* TOMPSETT, *as they partake of tea together*). And how are all at home?

TOMPSETT. Fairish, my lord, if 'tis the horses you are inquiring for?

LORD LOAM. No, no, the family. How 's the baby?

TOMPSETT. Blooming, your lordship.

LORD LOAM. A very fine boy. I remember saying so when I saw him; nice little fellow.

TOMPSETT (*not quite knowing whether to let it pass*). Beg pardon, my lord, it 's a girl.

LORD LOAM. A girl? Aha! ha! ha! exactly what I said. I distinctly remember saying, If it 's spared it will be a girl.

(CRICHTON *now comes down.*)

LORD LOAM. Very delighted to see you, Crichton.

(CRICHTON *has to shake hands.*)

Mary, you know Mr. Crichton?

(*He wanders off in search of other prey.*)

LADY MARY. Milk and sugar, Crichton?

CRICHTON. I 'm ashamed to be seen talking to you, my lady.

LADY MARY. To such a perfect servant as you all this must be most distasteful. (CRICHTON *is too respectful to answer.*) Oh, please to speak, or I shall have to recite. You do hate it, don't you?

CRICHTON. It pains me, your ladyship. It disturbs the etiquette of the servants' hall. After last month's meeting the pageboy, in a burst of equality, called me Crichton. He was dismissed.

LADY MARY. I wonder—I really do—how you can remain with us.

CRICHTON. I should have felt compelled to give notice, my lady, if the master had not had a seat in the Upper House. I cling to that.

LADY MARY. Do go on speaking. Tell me,

what did Mr. Ernest mean by saying he was not young enough to know everything?

CRICHTON. I have no idea, my lady.

LADY MARY. But you laughed.

CRICHTON. My lady, he is the second son of a peer.

LADY MARY. Very proper sentiments. You are a good soul, Crichton.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*desperately to* TWEENY). And now tell me, have you been to the Opera? What sort of weather have you been having in the kitchen? (TWEENY *gurgles.*) For Heaven's sake, woman, be articulate.

CRICHTON (*still talking to* LADY MARY). No, my lady; his lordship may compel us to be equal upstairs, but there will never be equality in the servants' hall.

LORD LOAM (*overhearing this*). What 's that? No equality? Can't you see, Crichton, that our divisions into classes are artificial, that if we were to return to Nature, which is the aspiration of my life, all would be equal?

CRICHTON. If I may make so bold as to contradict your lordship——

LORD LOAM (*with an effort*). Go on.

CRICHTON. The divisions into classes, my lord, are not artificial. They are the natural outcome of a civilised society. (*To* LADY MARY.) There must always be a master and servants in all civilised communities, my lady, for it is natural, and whatever is natural is right.

LORD LOAM (*wincing*). It is very unnatural for me to stand here and allow you to talk such nonsense.

CRICHTON (*eagerly*). Yes, my lord, it is. That is what I have been striving to point out to your lordship.

AGATHA (*to* CATHERINE). What is the matter with Fisher? She is looking daggers.

CATHERINE. The tedious creature; some question of etiquette, I suppose.

(*She sails across to* FISHER.)

How are you, Fisher?

FISHER (*with a toss of her head*). I am nothing, my lady, I am nothing at all.

AGATHA. Oh dear, who says so?

FISHER (*affronted*). His lordship has asked

that kitchen wench to have a second cup of tea.

CATHERINE. But why not?

FISHER. If it pleases his lordship to offer it to *her* before offering it to *me*——

AGATHA. So that is it. Do you want another cup of tea, Fisher?

FISHER. No, my lady—but my position—I should have been asked first.

AGATHA. Oh dear.

(*All this has taken some time, and by now the feeble appetites of the uncomfortable guests have been satiated. But they know there is still another ordeal to face—his lordship's monthly speech. Every one awaits it with misgiving—the servants lest they should applaud, as last time, in the wrong place, and the daughters because he may be personal about them, as the time before.* ERNEST *is annoyed that there should be this speech at all when there is such a much better one coming, and* BROCKLEHURST *foresees the degradation of the peerage. All are thinking*

of themselves alone save CRICHTON, *who knows his master's weakness, and fears he may stick in the middle.* LORD LOAM, *however, advances cheerfully to his doom. He sees* ERNEST'S *stool, and artfully stands on it, to his nephew's natural indignation. The three ladies knit their lips, the servants look down their noses, and the address begins.*)

LORD LOAM. My friends, I am glad to see you all looking so happy. It used to be predicted by the scoffer that these meetings would prove distasteful to you. Are they distasteful? I hear you laughing at the question.

(*He has not heard them, but he hears them now, the watchful* CRICHTON *giving them a lead.*)

No harm in saying that among us to-day is one who was formerly hostile to the movement, but who to-day has been won over. I refer to Lord Brocklehurst, who, I am sure, will presently say to me that if the charming lady now by his side has derived as much pleasure from his company as he

has derived from hers, he will be more than satisfied.

(*All look at* TWEENY, *who trembles.*)

For the time being the artificial and unnatural —I say unnatural (*glaring at* CRICHTON, *who bows slightly*)—barriers of society are swept away. Would that they could be swept away for ever.

(*The* PAGEBOY *cheers, and has the one moment of prominence in his life. He grows up, marries and has children, but is never really heard of again.*)

But that is entirely and utterly out of the question. And now for a few months we are to be separated. As you know, my daughters and Mr. Ernest and Mr. Treherne are to accompany me on my yacht, on a voyage to distant parts of the earth. In less than forty-eight hours we shall be under weigh.

(*But for* CRICHTON'S *eye the reckless* PAGEBOY *would repeat his success.*)

Do not think our life on the yacht is to be one long idle holiday. My views on the excessive luxury of the day are well known, and what

I preach I am resolved to practise. I have therefore decided that my daughters, instead of having one maid each as at present, shall on this voyage have but one maid between them.

(*Three maids rise; also three mistresses.*)

CRICHTON. My lord!

LORD LOAM. My mind is made up.

ERNEST. I cordially agree.

LORD LOAM. And now, my friends, I should like to think that there is some piece of advice I might give you, some thought, some noble saying over which you might ponder in my absence. In this connection I remember a proverb, which has had a great effect on my own life. I first heard it many years ago. I have never forgotten it. It constantly cheers and guides me. That proverb is—that proverb was—the proverb I speak of——

(*He grows pale and taps his forehead.*)

LADY MARY. Oh dear, I believe he has forgotten it.

LORD LOAM (*desperately*). The proverb—that proverb to which I refer——

(*Alas, it has gone. The distress is*

general. He has not even the sense to sit down. He gropes for the proverb in the air. They try applause, but it is no help.)

I have it now—(*not he*).

LADY MARY (*with confidence*). Crichton.

(*He does not fail her. As quietly as if he were in goloshes, mind as well as feet, he dismisses the domestics; they go according to precedence as they entered, yet, in a moment, they are gone. Then he signs to* MR. TREHERNE, *and they conduct* LORD LOAM *with dignity from the room. His hands are still catching flies; he still mutters, 'The proverb—that proverb'; but he continues, owing to* CRICHTON'S *skilful treatment, to look every inch a peer. The ladies have now an opportunity to air their indignation.*)

LADY MARY. One maid among three grown women!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mary, I think I had better go. That dreadful kitchenmaid——

LADY MARY. I can't blame you, George.

(*He salutes her.*)

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Your father's views are shocking to me, and I am glad I am not to be one of the party on the yacht. My respect for myself, Mary, my natural anxiety as to what mother will say. I shall see you, darling, before you sail.

(*He bows to the others and goes.*)

ERNEST. Selfish brute, only thinking of himself. What about my speech?

LADY MARY. One maid among three of us. What 's to be done?

ERNEST. Pooh! You must do for yourselves, that 's all.

LADY MARY. Do for ourselves. How can we know where our things are kept?

AGATHA. Are you aware that dresses button up the back?

CATHERINE. How are we to get into our shoes and be prepared for the carriage?

LADY MARY. Who is to put us to bed, and who is to get us up, and how shall we ever know it 's morning if there is no one to pull up the blinds?

(CRICHTON *crosses on his way out.*)

ERNEST. How is his lordship now?

CRICHTON. A little easier, sir.

LADY MARY. Crichton, send Fisher to me.

(*He goes.*)

ERNEST. I have no pity for you girls, I——

LADY MARY. Ernest, go away, and don't insult the broken-hearted.

ERNEST. And uncommon glad I am to go. Ta-ta, all of you. He asked me to say a few words. I came here to say a few words, and I 'm not at all sure that I couldn't bring an action against him.

(*He departs, feeling that he has left a dart behind him. The girls are alone with their tragic thoughts.*)

LADY MARY (*become a mother to the younger ones at last*). My poor sisters, come here. (*They go to her doubtfully.*) We must make this draw us closer together. I shall do my best to help you in every way. Just now I cannot think of myself at all.

AGATHA. But how unlike you, Mary.

LADY MARY. It is my duty to protect my sisters.

CATHERINE. I never knew her so sweet before, Agatha. (*Cautiously.*) What do you propose to do, Mary?

LADY MARY. I propose when we are on the yacht to lend Fisher to you when I don't need her myself.

AGATHA. Fisher?

LADY MARY (*who has the most character of the three*). Of course, as the eldest, I have decided that it is *my* maid we shall take with us.

CATHERINE (*speaking also for* AGATHA). Mary, you toad.

AGATHA. Nothing on earth would induce Fisher to lift her hand for either me or Catherine.

LADY MARY. I was afraid of it, Agatha. That is why I am so sorry for you.

(*The further exchange of pleasantries is interrupted by the arrival of* FISHER.)

LADY MARY. Fisher, you heard what his lordship said?

FISHER. Yes, my lady.

LADY MARY (*coldly, though the others would have tried blandishment*). You have given me

some satisfaction of late, Fisher, and to mark my approval I have decided that you shall be the maid who accompanies us.

FISHER (*acidly*). I thank you, my lady.

LADY MARY. That is all; you may go.

FISHER (*rapping it out*). If you please, my lady, I wish to give notice.

(CATHERINE *and* AGATHA *gleam, but* LADY MARY *is of sterner stuff.*)

LADY MARY (*taking up a book*). Oh, certainly —you may go.

CATHERINE. But why, Fisher?

FISHER. I could not undertake, my lady, to wait upon three. *We* don't do it. (*In an indignant outburst to* LADY MARY.) Oh, my lady, to think that this affront——

LADY MARY (*looking up*). I thought I told you to go, Fisher.

(FISHER *stands for a moment irresolute; then goes. As soon as she has gone* LADY MARY *puts down her book and weeps. She is a pretty woman, but this is the only pretty thing we have seen her do yet.*)

AGATHA (*succinctly*). Serves you right.

(CRICHTON *comes.*)

CATHERINE. It will be Simmons after all. Send Simmons to me.

CRICHTON (*after hesitating*). My lady, might I venture to speak?

CATHERINE. What is it?

CRICHTON. I happen to know, your ladyship, that Simmons desires to give notice for the same reason as Fisher.

CATHERINE. Oh!

AGATHA (*triumphant*). Then, Catherine, we take Jeanne.

CRICHTON. And Jeanne also, my lady.

(LADY MARY *is reading, indifferent though the heavens fall, but her sisters are not ashamed to show their despair to* CRICHTON.)

AGATHA. We can't blame them. Could any maid who respected herself be got to wait upon three?

LADY MARY (*with languid interest*). I suppose there are such persons, Crichton?

CRICHTON (*guardedly*). I have heard, my lady, that there are such.

LADY MARY (*a little desperate*). Crichton, what 's to be done? We sail in two days; could one be discovered in the time?

AGATHA (*frankly a supplicant*). Surely you can think of some one?

CRICHTON (*after hesitating*). There is in this establishment, your ladyship, a young woman——

LADY MARY. Yes?

CRICHTON. A young woman, on whom I have for some time cast an eye.

CATHERINE (*eagerly*). Do you mean as a possible lady's-maid?

CRICHTON. I had thought of her, my lady, in another connection.

LADY MARY. Ah!

CRICHTON. But I believe she is quite the young person you require. Perhaps if you could see her, my lady——

LADY MARY. I shall certainly see her. Bring her to me. (*He goes.*) You two needn't wait.

CATHERINE. Needn't we? We see your little game, Mary.

AGATHA. We shall certainly remain and have our two-thirds of her.

(*They sit there doggedly until* CRICHTON *returns with* TWEENY, *who looks scared.*)

CRICHTON. This, my lady, is the young person.

CATHERINE (*frankly*). Oh dear!

(*It is evident that all three consider her quite unsuitable.*)

LADY MARY. Come here, girl. Don't be afraid.

(TWEENY *looks imploringly at her idol.*)

CRICHTON. Her appearance, my lady, is homely, and her manners, as you may have observed, deplorable, but she has a heart of gold.

LADY MARY. What is your position downstairs?

TWEENY (*bobbing*). I 'm a tweeny, your ladyship.

CATHERINE. A what?

CRICHTON. A tweeny; that is to say, my lady, she is not at present, strictly speaking, anything; a *between* maid; she helps the

vegetable maid. It is she, my lady, who conveys the dishes from the one end of the kitchen table, where they are placed by the cook, to the other end, where they enter into the charge of Thomas and John.

LADY MARY. I see. And you and Crichton are—ah—keeping company?

(CRICHTON *draws himself up.*)

TWEENY (*aghast*). A butler don't keep company, my lady.

LADY MARY (*indifferently*). Does he not?

CRICHTON. No, your ladyship, we butlers may—(*he makes a gesture with his arms*)—but we do not keep company.

AGATHA. I know what it is; you are engaged?

(TWEENY *looks longingly at* CRICHTON.)

CRICHTON. Certainly not, my lady. The utmost I can say at present is that I have cast a favourable eye.

(*Even this is much to* TWEENY.)

LADY MARY. As you choose. But I am afraid, Crichton, she will not suit us.

CRICHTON. My lady, beneath this simple

exterior are concealed a very sweet nature and rare womanly gifts.

AGATHA. Unfortunately, that is not what we want.

CRICHTON. And it is she, my lady, who dresses the hair of the ladies'-maids for our evening meals.

(*The ladies are interested at last.*)

LADY MARY. She dresses Fisher's hair?

TWEENY. Yes, my lady, and I does them up when they goes to parties.

CRICHTON (*pained, but not scolding*). *Does!*

TWEENY. Doos. And it 's me what alters your gowns to fit them.

CRICHTON. *What* alters!

TWEENY. Which alters.

AGATHA. Mary?

LADY MARY. I shall certainly have her.

CATHERINE. *We* shall certainly have her. Tweeny, we have decided to make a lady's-maid of you.

TWEENY. Oh lawks!

AGATHA. We are doing this for you so that your position socially may be more nearly akin to that of Crichton.

CRICHTON (*gravely*). It will undoubtedly increase the young person's chances.

LADY MARY. Then if I get a good character for you from Mrs. Perkins, she will make the necessary arrangements.

(*She resumes reading.*)

TWEENY (*elated*). My lady!

LADY MARY. By the way, I hope you are a good sailor.

TWEENY (*startled*). You don't mean, my lady, I 'm to go on the ship?

LADY MARY. Certainly.

TWEENY. But— (*To* CRICHTON.) You ain't going, sir?

CRICHTON. No.

TWEENY (*firm at last*). Then neither ain't I.

AGATHA. You must.

TWEENY. Leave him! Not me.

LADY MARY. Girl, don't be silly. Crichton will be—considered in your wages.

TWEENY. I ain't going.

CRICHTON. I feared this, my lady.

TWEENY. Nothing 'll budge me.

LADY MARY. Leave the room.

(CRICHTON *shows* TWEENY *out with marked politeness.*)

AGATHA. Crichton, I think you might have shown more displeasure with her.

CRICHTON (*contrite*). I was touched, my lady. I see, my lady, that to part from her would be a wrench to me, though I could not well say so in her presence, not having yet decided how far I shall go with her.

(*He is about to go when* LORD LOAM *returns, fuming.*)

LORD LOAM. The ingrate! The smug! The fop!

CATHERINE. What is it now, father?

LORD LOAM. That man of mine, Rolleston, refuses to accompany us because you are to have but one maid.

AGATHA. Hurrah!

LADY MARY (*in better taste*). Darling father, rather than you should lose Rolleston, we will consent to take all the three of them.

LORD LOAM. Pooh, nonsense! Crichton, find me a valet who can do without three maids.

CRICHTON. Yes, my lord. (*Troubled.*) In the

time—the more suitable the party, my lord, the less willing will he be to come without the—the usual perquisites.

LORD LOAM. Any one will do.

CRICHTON (*shocked*). My lord!

LORD LOAM. The ingrate! The puppy!

(AGATHA *has an idea, and whispers to* LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY. I ask a favour of a servant?—never!

AGATHA. Then I will. Crichton, would it not be very distressing to you to let his lordship go, attended by a valet who might prove unworthy? It is only for three months; don't you think that you—you yourself—you——

(*As* CRICHTON *sees what she wants he pulls himself up with noble, offended dignity, and she is appalled.*)

I beg your pardon.

(*He bows stiffly.*)

CATHERINE (*to* CRICHTON). But think of the joy to Tweeny.

(CRICHTON *is moved, but he shakes his head.*)

LADY MARY (*so much the cleverest*). Crichton, do you think it safe to let the master you love go so far away without you while he has these dangerous views about equality?

(CRICHTON *is profoundly stirred. After a struggle he goes to his master, who has been pacing the room.*)

CRICHTON. My lord, I have found a man.

LORD LOAM. Already? Who is he?

(CRICHTON *presents himself with a gesture.*)

Yourself?

CATHERINE. Father, how good of him.

LORD LOAM (*pleased, but thinking it a small thing*). Uncommon good. Thank you, Crichton. This helps me nicely out of a hole; and how it will annoy Rolleston! Come with me, and we shall tell him. Not that I think you have lowered yourself in any way. Come along.

(*He goes, and* CRICHTON *is to follow him, but is stopped by* AGATHA *impulsively offering him her hand.*)

CRICHTON (*who is much shaken*). My lady—a valet's hand!

AGATHA. I had no idea you would feel it so deeply; why did you do it?

(CRICHTON *is too respectful to reply.*)

LADY MARY (*regarding him*). Crichton, I am curious. I insist upon an answer.

CRICHTON. My lady, I am the son of a butler and a lady's-maid—perhaps the happiest of all combinations, and to me the most beautiful thing in the world is a haughty, aristocratic English house, with every one kept in his place. Though I were equal to your ladyship, where would be the pleasure to me? It would be counterbalanced by the pain of feeling that Thomas and John were equal to me.

CATHERINE. But father says if we were to return to Nature——

CRICHTON. If we did, my lady, the first thing we should do would be to elect a head. Circumstances might alter cases; the same person might not be master; the same persons might not be servants. I can't say as to that,

nor should we have the deciding of it. Nature would decide for us.

LADY MARY. You seem to have thought it all out carefully, Crichton.

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady.

CATHERINE. And you have done this for us, Crichton, because you thought that—that father needed to be kept in his place?

CRICHTON. I should prefer you to say, my lady, that I have done it for the house.

AGATHA. Thank you, Crichton. Mary, be nicer to him. (*But* LADY MARY *has begun to read again.*) If there was any way in which we could show our gratitude.

CRICHTON. If I might venture, my lady, would you kindly show it by becoming more like Lady Mary. That disdain is what we like from our superiors. Even so do we, the upper servants, disdain the lower servants, while they take it out of the odds and ends.

(*He goes, and they bury themselves in cushions.*)

AGATHA. Oh dear, what a tiring day.

CATHERINE. I feel dead. Tuck in your feet, you selfish thing.

(LADY MARY *is lying reading on another couch.*)

LADY MARY. I wonder what he meant by circumstances might alter cases.

AGATHA (*yawning*). Don't talk, Mary, I was nearly asleep.

LADY MARY. I wonder what he meant by the same person might not be master, and the same persons might not be servants.

CATHERINE. Do be quiet, Mary, and leave it to Nature; he said Nature would decide.

LADY MARY. I wonder——

(*But she does not wonder very much. She would wonder more if she knew what was coming. Her book slips unregarded to the floor. The ladies are at rest until it is time to dress.*)

End of Act I.

ACT II

ACT II

THE ISLAND

Two months have elapsed, and the scene is a desert island in the Pacific, on which our adventurers have been wrecked.

The curtain rises on a sea of bamboo, which shuts out all view save the foliage of palm trees and some gaunt rocks. Occasionally Crichton and Treherne come momentarily into sight, hacking and hewing the bamboo, through which they are making a clearing between the ladies and the shore; and by and by, owing to their efforts, we shall have an unrestricted outlook on to a sullen sea that is at present hidden. Then we shall also be able to note a mast standing out of the water—all that is left, saving floating wreckage, of the ill-fated yacht the Bluebell. *The beginnings of a hut will also be seen, with Crichton driving its walls into the ground or astride its roof of saplings, for at present he is doing more than one thing at a time. In a red shirt, with the ends of his sailor's breeches thrust into wading-boots, he looks a man for the moment; we*

suddenly remember some one's saying—perhaps it was ourselves—that a cataclysm would be needed to get him out of his servant's clothes, and apparently it has been forthcoming. It is no longer beneath our dignity to cast an inquiring eye on his appearance. His features are not distinguished, but he has a strong jaw and green eyes, in which a yellow light burns that we have not seen before. His dark hair, hitherto so decorously sleek, has been ruffled this way and that by wind and weather, as if they were part of the cataclysm and wanted to help his chance. His muscles must be soft and flabby still, but though they shriek aloud to him to desist, he rains lusty blows with his axe, like one who has come upon the open for the first time in his life, and likes it. He is as yet far from being an expert woodsman—mark the blood on his hands at places where he has hit them instead of the tree; but note also that he does not waste time in bandaging them—he rubs them in the earth and goes on. His face is still of the discreet pallor that befits a butler, and he carries the smaller logs as if they were a salver; not in a day or a month will he shake off the badge of servitude, but without knowing it he has begun.

But for the hatchets at work, and an occasional something horrible falling from a tree into the ladies'

laps, they hear nothing save the mournful surf breaking on a coral shore.

They sit or recline huddled together against a rock, and they are farther from home, in every sense of the word, than ever before. Thirty-six hours ago, they were given three minutes in which to dress, without a maid, and reach the boats, and they have not made the best of that valuable time. None of them has boots, and had they known this prickly island they would have thought first of boots. They have a sufficiency of garments, but some of them were gifts dropped into the boat—Lady Mary's tarpaulin coat and hat, for instance, and Catherine's blue jersey and red cap, which certify that the two ladies were lately before the mast. Agatha is too gay in Ernest's dressing-gown, and clutches it to her person with both hands as if afraid that it may be claimed by its rightful owner. There are two pairs of bath slippers between the three of them, and their hair cries aloud and in vain for hairpins.

By their side, on an inverted bucket, sits Ernest, clothed neatly in the garments of day and night, but, alas, bare-footed. He is the only cheerful member of this company of four, but his brightness is due less to a manly desire to succour the helpless than to his having been lately in the throes of composition, and to

his modest satisfaction with the result. He reads to the ladies, and they listen, each with one scared eye to the things that fall from trees.

ERNEST (*who has written on the fly-leaf of the only book saved from the wreck*). This is what I have written. 'Wrecked, wrecked, wrecked! on an island in the Tropics, the following: the Hon. Ernest Woolley, the Rev. John Treherne, the Ladies Mary, Catherine, and Agatha Lasenby, with two servants. We are the sole survivors of Lord Loam's steam yacht *Bluebell*, which encountered a fearful gale in these seas, and soon became a total wreck. The crew behaved gallantly, putting us all into the first boat. What became of them I cannot tell, but we, after dreadful sufferings, and insufficiently clad, in whatever garments we could lay hold of in the dark'——

LADY MARY. Please don't describe our garments.

ERNEST. —'succeeded in reaching this island, with the loss of only one of our party, namely, Lord Loam, who flung away his life in

a gallant attempt to save a servant who had fallen overboard.'

(*The ladies have wept long and sore for their father, but there is something in this last utterance that makes them look up.*)

AGATHA. But, Ernest, it was Crichton who jumped overboard trying to save father.

ERNEST (*with the candour that is one of his most engaging qualities*). Well, you know, it was rather silly of uncle to fling away his life by trying to get into the boat first; and as this document may be printed in the English papers, it struck me, an English peer, you know——

LADY MARY (*every inch an English peer's daughter*). Ernest, that is very thoughtful of you.

ERNEST (*continuing, well pleased*). —'By night the cries of wild cats and the hissing of snakes terrify us extremely'—(*this does not satisfy him so well, and he makes a correction*)—'terrify the ladies extremely. Against these we have no weapons except one cutlass and a

hatchet. A bucket washed ashore is at present our only comfortable seat'——

LADY MARY (*with some spirit*). And Ernest is sitting on it.

ERNEST. H'sh! Oh, do be quiet. —'To add to our horrors, night falls suddenly in these parts, and it is then that savage animals begin to prowl and roar.'

LADY MARY. Have you said that vampire bats suck the blood from our toes as we sleep?

ERNEST. No, that 's all. I end up, 'Rescue us or we perish. Rich reward. Signed Ernest Woolley, in command of our little party.' This is written on a leaf taken out of a book of poems that Crichton found in his pocket. Fancy Crichton being a reader of poetry. Now I shall put it into the bottle and fling it into the sea.

(*He pushes the precious document into a soda-water bottle, and rams the cork home. At the same moment, and without effort, he gives birth to one of his most characteristic epigrams.*)

The tide is going out, we mustn't miss the post.

(*They are so unhappy that they fail to grasp it, and a little petulantly he calls for* CRICHTON, *ever his stand-by in the hour of epigram.* CRICHTON *breaks through the undergrowth quickly, thinking the ladies are in danger.*)

CRICHTON. Anything wrong, sir?

ERNEST (*with fine confidence*). The tide, Crichton, is a postman who calls at our island twice a day for letters.

CRICHTON (*after a pause*). Thank you, sir.

(*He returns to his labours, however, without giving the smile which is the epigrammatist's right, and* ERNEST *is a little disappointed in him.*)

ERNEST. Poor Crichton! I sometimes think he is losing his sense of humour. Come along, Agatha.

(*He helps his favourite up the rocks, and they disappear gingerly from view.*)

CATHERINE. How horribly still it is.

LADY MARY (*remembering some recent sounds*). It is best when it is still.

CATHERINE (*drawing closer to her*). Mary, I

have heard that they are always very still just before they jump.

LADY MARY. Don't. (*A distinct chopping is heard, and they are startled.*)

LADY MARY (*controlling herself*). It is only Crichton knocking down trees.

CATHERINE (*almost imploringly*). Mary, let us go and stand beside him.

LADY MARY (*coldly*). Let a servant see that I am afraid!

CATHERINE. Don't, then; but remember this, dear, they often drop on one from above.

(*She moves away, nearer to the friendly sound of the axe, and* LADY MARY *is left alone. She is the most courageous of them as well as the haughtiest, but when something she had thought to be a stick glides toward her, she forgets her dignity and screams.*)

LADY MARY (*calling*). Crichton, Crichton!

(*It must have been* TREHERNE *who was tree-felling, for* CRICHTON *comes to her from the hut, drawing his cutlass.*)

CRICHTON (*anxious*). Did you call, my lady?

LADY MARY (*herself again, now that he is there*). I! Why should I?

CRICHTON. I made a mistake, your ladyship. (*Hesitating.*) If you are afraid of being alone, my lady——

LADY MARY. Afraid! Certainly not. (*Doggedly.*) You may go.

(*But she does not complain when he remains within eyesight cutting the bamboo. It is heavy work, and she watches him silently.*)

LADY MARY. I wish, Crichton, you could work without getting so hot.

CRICHTON (*mopping his face*). I wish I could, my lady.

(*He continues his labours.*)

LADY MARY (*taking off her oilskins*). It makes me hot to look at you.

CRICHTON. It almost makes me cool to look at your ladyship.

LADY MARY (*who perhaps thinks he is presuming*). Anything I can do for you in that way, Crichton, I shall do with pleasure.

CRICHTON (*quite humbly*). Thank you, my lady.

(*By this time most of the bamboo has been cut, and the shore and sea are visible, except where they are hidden by the half completed hut. The mast rising solitary from the water adds to the desolation of the scene, and at last tears run down* LADY MARY'S *face.*)

CRICHTON. Don't give way, my lady, things might be worse.

LADY MARY. My poor father.

CRICHTON. If I could have given my life for his.

LADY MARY. You did all a man could do. Indeed I thank you, Crichton. (*With some admiration and more wonder.*) You are a man.

CRICHTON. Thank you, my lady.

LADY MARY. But it is all so awful. Crichton, is there any hope of a ship coming?

CRICHTON (*after hesitation*). Of course there is, my lady.

LADY MARY (*facing him bravely*). Don't treat me as a child. I have got to know the worst, and to face it. Crichton, the truth.

CRICHTON (*reluctantly*). We were driven out of our course, my lady; I fear far from the track of commerce.

LADY MARY. Thank you; I understand.

(*For a moment, however, she breaks down. Then she clenches her hands and stands erect.*)

CRICHTON (*watching her, and forgetting perhaps for the moment that they are not just a man and woman*). You 're a good pluckt 'un, my lady.

LADY MARY (*falling into the same error*). I shall try to be. (*Extricating herself.*) Crichton, how dare you?

CRICHTON. I beg your ladyship's pardon; but you are.

(*She smiles, as if it were a comfort to be told this even by* CRICHTON.)

And until a ship comes we are three men who are going to do our best for you ladies.

LADY MARY (*with a curl of the lip*). Mr. Ernest does no work.

CRICHTON (*cheerily*). But he will, my lady.

LADY MARY. I doubt it.

CRICHTON (*confidently, but perhaps thoughtlessly*). No work—no dinner—will make a great change in Mr. Ernest.

LADY MARY. No work—no dinner. When did you invent that rule, Crichton?

CRICHTON (*loaded with bamboo*). I didn't invent it, my lady. I seem to see it growing all over the island.

LADY MARY (*disquieted*). Crichton, your manner strikes me as curious.

CRICHTON (*pained*). I hope not, your ladyship.

LADY MARY (*determined to have it out with him*). You are not implying anything so unnatural, I presume, as that if I and my sisters don't work there will be no dinner for *us*?

CRICHTON (*brightly*). If it is unnatural, my lady, that is the end of it.

LADY MARY. If? Now I understand. The perfect servant at home holds that we are all equal now. I see.

CRICHTON (*wounded to the quick*). My lady, can you think me so inconsistent?

LADY MARY. That is it.

CRICHTON (*earnestly*). My lady, I disbelieved in equality at home because it was against nature, and for that same reason I as utterly disbelieve in it on an island.

LADY MARY (*relieved by his obvious sincerity*). I apologise.

CRICHTON (*continuing unfortunately*). There must always, my lady, be one to command and others to obey.

LADY MARY (*satisfied*). One to command, others to obey. Yes. (*Then suddenly she realises that there may be a dire meaning in his confident words.*) Crichton!

CRICHTON (*who has intended no dire meaning*). What is it, my lady?

(*But she only stares into his face and then hurries from him. Left alone he is puzzled, but being a practical man he busies himself gathering firewood, until* TWEENY *appears excitedly carrying cocoa-nuts in her skirt. She has made better use than the ladies of her three minutes' grace for dressing.*)

TWEENY (*who can be happy even on an island if* CRICHTON *is with her*). Look what I found.

CRICHTON. Cocoa-nuts. Bravo!

TWEENY. They grows on trees.

CRICHTON. Where did you think they grew?

TWEENY. I thought as how they grew in rows on top of little sticks.

CRICHTON (*wrinkling his brows*). Oh Tweeny, Tweeny!

TWEENY (*anxiously*). Have I offended of your feelings again, sir?

CRICHTON. A little.

TWEENY (*in a despairing outburst*). I 'm full o' vulgar words and ways; and though I may keep them in their holes when you are by, as soon as I 'm by myself out they comes in a rush like beetles when the house is dark. I says them gloating-like, in my head—'Blooming' I says, and 'All my eye,' and 'Ginger,' and 'Nothink'; and all the time we was being wrecked I was praying to myself, 'Please the Lord it may be an island as it 's natural to be vulgar on.'

(*A shudder passes through* CRICHTON, *and she is abject.*)

That 's the kind I am, sir. I 'm 'opeless. You 'd better give me up.

(*She is a pathetic, forlorn creature, and his manhood is stirred.*)

CRICHTON (*wondering a little at himself for saying it*). I won't give you up. It is strange that one so common should attract one so fastidious; but so it is. (*Thoughtfully.*) There is something about you, Tweeny, there is a *je ne sais quoi* about you.

TWEENY (*knowing only that he has found something in her to commend*). Is there, is there? Oh, I am glad.

CRICHTON (*putting his hand on her shoulder like a protector*). We shall fight your vulgarity together. (*All this time he has been arranging sticks for his fire.*) Now get some dry grass.

(*She brings him grass, and he puts it under the sticks. He produces an odd lens from his pocket, and tries to focus the sun's rays.*)

TWEENY. Why, what 's that?

CRICHTON (*the ingenious creature*). That 's the glass from my watch and one from Mr.

Treherne's, with a little water between them. I 'm hoping to kindle a fire with it.

TWEENY (*properly impressed*). Oh sir!

(*After one failure the grass takes fire, and they are blowing on it when excited cries near by bring them sharply to their feet.* AGATHA *runs to them, white of face, followed by* ERNEST.)

ERNEST. Danger! Crichton, a tiger-cat!

CRICHTON (*getting his cutlass*). Where?

AGATHA. It is at our heels.

ERNEST. Look out, Crichton.

CRICHTON. H'sh!

(TREHERNE *comes to his assistance, while* LADY MARY *and* CATHERINE *join* AGATHA *in the hut.*)

ERNEST. It will be on us in a moment.

(*He seizes the hatchet and guards the hut. It is pleasing to see that* ERNEST *is no coward.*)

TREHERNE. Listen!

ERNEST. The grass is moving. It 's coming.

(*It comes. But it is no tiger-cat; it is* LORD LOAM *crawling on his hands and*

knees, a very exhausted and dishevelled peer, wondrously attired in rags. The girls see him, and with glad cries rush into his arms.)

LADY MARY. Father.

LORD LOAM. Mary—Catherine—Agatha. Oh dear, my dears, my dears, oh dear!

LADY MARY. Darling.

AGATHA. Sweetest.

CATHERINE. Love.

TREHERNE. Glad to see you, sir.

ERNEST. Uncle, uncle, dear old uncle.

(*For a time such happy cries fill the air, but presently* TREHERNE *is thoughtless.*)

TREHERNE. Ernest thought you were a tiger-cat.

LORD LOAM (*stung somehow to the quick*). Oh, did you? I knew you at once, Ernest; I knew you by the way you ran.

(ERNEST *smiles forgivingly.*)

CRICHTON (*venturing forward at last*). My lord, I am glad.

ERNEST (*with upraised finger*). But you are also idling, Crichton. (*Making himself com-*

fortable on the ground.) We mustn't waste time. To work, to work.

CRICHTON (*after contemplating him without rancour*). Yes, sir.

(*He gets a pot from the hut and hangs it on a tripod over the fire, which is now burning brightly.*)

TREHERNE. Ernest, you be a little more civil. Crichton, let me help.

(*He is soon busy helping* CRICHTON *to add to the strength of the hut.*)

LORD LOAM (*gazing at the pot as ladies are said to gaze on precious stones*). Is that—but I suppose I 'm dreaming again. (*Timidly.*) It isn't by any chance a pot on top of a fire, is it?

LADY MARY. Indeed, it is, dearest. It is our supper.

LORD LOAM. I have been dreaming of a pot on a fire for two days. (*Quivering.*) There 's nothing in it, is there?

ERNEST. Sniff, uncle. (LORD LOAM *sniffs.*)

LORD LOAM (*reverently*). It smells of onions!

(*There is a sudden diversion.*)

CATHERINE. Father, you have boots!

LADY MARY. So he has.

LORD LOAM. Of course I have.

ERNEST (*with greedy cunning*). You are actually wearing boots, uncle. It 's very unsafe, you know, in this climate.

LORD LOAM. Is it?

ERNEST. We have all abandoned them, you observe. The blood, the arteries, you know.

LORD LOAM. I hadn't a notion.

(*He holds out his feet, and* ERNEST *kneels.*)

ERNEST. O Lord, yes.

(*In another moment those boots will be his.*)

LADY MARY (*quickly*). Father, he is trying to get your boots from you. There is nothing in the world we wouldn't give for boots.

ERNEST (*rising haughtily, a proud spirit misunderstood*). I only wanted the loan of them.

AGATHA (*running her fingers along them lovingly*). If you lend them to any one, it will be to us, won't it, father.

LORD LOAM. Certainly, my child.

ERNEST. Oh, very well. (*He is leaving these selfish ones.*) I don't want your old boots. (*He gives his uncle a last chance.*) You don't think you could spare me *one* boot?

LORD LOAM (*tartly*). I do not.

ERNEST. Quite so. Well, all I can say is I 'm sorry for you.

(*He departs to recline elsewhere.*)

LADY MARY. Father, we thought we should never see you again.

LORD LOAM. I was washed ashore, my dear, clinging to a hencoop. How awful that first night was.

LADY MARY. Poor father.

LORD LOAM. When I woke, I wept. Then I began to feel extremely hungry. There was a large turtle on the beach. I remembered from the *Swiss Family Robinson* that if you turn a turtle over he is helpless. My dears, I crawled towards him, I flung myself upon him —(*here he pauses to rub his leg*)—the nasty, spiteful brute.

LADY MARY. You didn't turn him over?

LORD LOAM (*vindictively, though he is a kindly*

man). Mary, the senseless thing wouldn't wait; I found that none of them would wait.

CATHERINE. We should have been as badly off if Crichton hadn't——

LADY MARY (*quickly*). Don't praise Crichton.

LORD LOAM. And then those beastly monkeys. I always understood that if you flung stones at them they would retaliate by flinging cocoa-nuts at you. Would you believe it, I flung a hundred stones, and not one monkey had sufficient intelligence to grasp my meaning. How I longed for Crichton.

LADY MARY (*wincing*). For us also, father?

LORD LOAM. For you also. I tried for hours to make a fire. The authors say that when wrecked on an island you can obtain a light by rubbing two pieces of stick together. (*With feeling.*) The liars!

LADY MARY. And all this time you thought there was no one on the island but yourself?

LORD LOAM. I thought so until this morning. I was searching the pools for little fishes, which I caught in my hat, when suddenly I saw before me—on the sand——

CATHERINE. What?

LORD LOAM. A hairpin.

LADY MARY. A hairpin! It must be one of ours. Give it me, father.

AGATHA. No, it 's mine.

LORD LOAM. I didn't keep it.

LADY MARY (*speaking for all three*). Didn't keep it? Found a hairpin on an island, and didn't keep it?

LORD LOAM (*humbly*). My dears.

AGATHA (*scarcely to be placated*). Oh father, we have returned to nature more than you bargained for.

LADY MARY. For shame, Agatha. (*She has something on her mind.*) Father, there is something I want you to do at once—I mean to assert your position as the chief person on the island.

(*They are all surprised.*)

LORD LOAM. But who would presume to question it?

CATHERINE. She must mean Ernest.

LADY MARY. Must I?

AGATHA. It 's cruel to say anything against Ernest.

LORD LOAM (*firmly*). If any one presumes to challenge my position, I shall make short work of him.

AGATHA. Here comes Ernest; now see if you can say these horrid things to his face.

LORD LOAM. I shall teach him his place at once.

LADY MARY (*anxiously*). But how?

LORD LOAM (*chuckling*). I have just thought of an extremely amusing way of doing it. (*As* ERNEST *approaches.*) Ernest.

ERNEST (*loftily*). Excuse me, uncle, I 'm thinking. I 'm planning out the building of this hut.

LORD LOAM. I also have been thinking.

ERNEST. That don't matter.

LORD LOAM. Eh?

ERNEST. Please, please, this is important.

LORD LOAM. I have been thinking that I ought to give you my boots.

ERNEST. What!

LADY MARY. Father.

LORD LOAM (*genially*). Take them, my boy. (*With a rapidity we had not thought him capable*

of, ERNEST *becomes the wearer of the boots.*) And now I dare say you want to know why I give them to you, Ernest?

ERNEST (*moving up and down in them deliciously*). Not at all. The great thing is, 'I 've got 'em, I 've got 'em.'

LORD LOAM (*majestically, but with a knowing look at his daughters*). My reason is that, as head of our little party, you, Ernest, shall be our hunter, you shall clear the forests of those savage beasts that make them so dangerous. (*Pleasantly.*) And now you know, my dear nephew, why I have given you my boots.

ERNEST. This is my answer.

(*He kicks off the boots.*)

LADY MARY (*still anxious*). Father, assert yourself.

LORD LOAM. I shall now assert myself. (*But how to do it? He has a happy thought.*) Call Crichton.

LADY MARY. Oh father.

(CRICHTON *comes in answer to a summons, and is followed by* TREHERNE.)

ERNEST (*wondering a little at* LADY MARY'S *grave face*). Crichton, look here.

LORD LOAM (*sturdily*). Silence! Crichton, I want your advice as to what I ought to do with Mr. Ernest. He has defied me.

ERNEST. Pooh!

CRICHTON (*after considering*). May I speak openly, my lord?

LADY MARY (*keeping her eyes fixed on him*). That is what we desire.

CRICHTON (*quite humbly*). Then I may say, your lordship, that I have been considering Mr. Ernest's case at odd moments ever since we were wrecked.

ERNEST. My case?

LORD LOAM (*sternly*). Hush.

CRICHTON. Since we landed on the island, my lord, it seems to me that Mr. Ernest's epigrams have been particularly brilliant.

ERNEST (*gratified*). Thank you, Crichton.

CRICHTON. But I find—I seem to find it growing wild, my lord, in the woods, that sayings which would be justly admired in England are not much use on an island. I would

therefore most respectfully propose that henceforth every time Mr. Ernest favours us with an epigram his head should be immersed in a bucket of cold spring water.

(*There is a terrible silence.*)

LORD LOAM (*uneasily*). Serve him right.

ERNEST. I should like to see you try to do it, uncle.

CRICHTON (*ever ready to come to the succour of his lordship*). My feeling, my lord, is that at the next offence I should convey him to a retired spot, where I shall carry out the undertaking in as respectful a manner as is consistent with a thorough immersion.

(*Though his manner is most respectful, he is firm; he evidently means what he says.*)

LADY MARY (*a ramrod*). Father, you must not permit this; Ernest is your nephew.

LORD LOAM (*with his hand to his brow*). After all, he is my nephew, Crichton; and, as I am sure, he now sees that I am a strong man——

ERNEST (*foolishly in the circumstances*). A

strong man. You mean a stout man. You are one of mind to two of matter.

(*He looks round in the old way for approval. No one has smiled, and to his consternation he sees that* CRICHTON *is quietly turning up his sleeves.* ERNEST *makes an appealing gesture to his uncle; then he turns defiantly to* CRICHTON.)

CRICHTON. Is it to be before the ladies, Mr. Ernest, or in the privacy of the wood? (*He fixes* ERNEST *with his eye.* ERNEST *is cowed.*) Come.

ERNEST (*affecting bravado*). Oh, all right.

CRICHTON (*succinctly*). Bring the bucket.

(ERNEST *hesitates. He then lifts the bucket and follows* CRICHTON *to the nearest spring.*)

LORD LOAM (*rather white*). I 'm sorry for him, but I had to be firm.

LADY MARY. Oh father, it wasn't you who was firm. Crichton did it himself.

LORD LOAM. Bless me, so he did.

LADY MARY. Father, be strong.

LORD LOAM (*bewildered*). You can't mean that my faithful Crichton——

LADY MARY. Yes, I do.

TREHERNE. Lady Mary, I stake my word that Crichton is incapable of acting dishonourably.

LADY MARY. I know that; I know it as well as you. Don't you see that that is what makes him so dangerous?

TREHERNE. By Jove, I—I believe I catch your meaning.

CATHERINE. He is coming back.

LORD LOAM (*who has always known himself to be a man of ideas*). Let us all go into the hut, just to show him at once that it is *our* hut.

LADY MARY (*as they go*). Father, I implore you, assert yourself now and for ever.

LORD LOAM. I will.

LADY MARY. And, please, don't ask him how you are to do it.

(CRICHTON *returns with sticks to mend the fire.*)

LORD LOAM (*loftily, from the door of the*

hut). Have you carried out my instructions, Crichton?

CRICHTON (*deferentially*). Yes, my lord.

(ERNEST *appears, mopping his hair, which has become very wet since we last saw him. He is not bearing malice, he is too busy drying, but* AGATHA *is specially his champion.*)

AGATHA. It 's infamous, infamous.

LORD LOAM (*strongly*). *My* orders, Agatha.

LADY MARY. Now, father, please.

LORD LOAM (*striking an attitude*). Before I give you any further orders, Crichton——

CRICHTON. Yes, my lord.

LORD LOAM (*delighted*). Pooh! It 's all right.

LADY MARY. No. Please go on.

LORD LOAM. Well, well. This question of the leadership; what do you think now, Crichton?

CRICHTON. My lord, I feel it is a matter with which *I* have nothing to do.

LORD LOAM. Excellent. Ha, Mary? That settles it, I think.

LADY MARY. It seems to, but—I 'm not sure.

CRICHTON. It will settle itself naturally, my lord, without any interference from us.

(*The reference to Nature gives general dissatisfaction.*)

LADY MARY. Father.

LORD LOAM (*a little severely*). It settled itself long ago, Crichton, when I was born a peer, and you, for instance, were born a servant.

CRICHTON (*acquiescing*). Yes, my lord, that was how it all came about quite naturally in England. We had nothing to do with it there, and we shall have as little to do with it here.

TREHERNE (*relieved*). That 's all right.

LADY MARY (*determined to clinch the matter*). One moment. In short, Crichton, his lordship will continue to be our natural head.

CRICHTON. I dare say, my lady, I dare say.

CATHERINE. But you must *know*.

CRICHTON. Asking your pardon, my lady, one can't be sure—on an island.

(*They look at each other uneasily.*)

LORD LOAM (*warningly*). Crichton, I don't like this.

CRICHTON (*harassed*). The more I think of it, your lordship, the more uneasy I become myself. When I heard, my lord, that you had left that hairpin behind——

(*He is pained.*)

LORD LOAM (*feebly*). One hairpin among so many would only have caused dissension.

CRICHTON (*very sorry to have to contradict him*). Not so, my lord. From that hairpin we could have made a needle; with that needle we could, out of skins, have sewn trousers—of which your lordship is in need; indeed, we are all in need of them.

LADY MARY (*suddenly self-conscious*). All?

CRICHTON. On an island, my lady.

LADY MARY. Father.

CRICHTON (*really more distressed by the prospect than she*). My lady, if Nature does not think them necessary, you may be sure she will not ask you to wear them. (*Shaking his head.*) But among all this undergrowth——

LADY MARY. Now you see this man in his true colours.

LORD LOAM (*violently*). Crichton, you will

either this moment say, 'Down with Nature,' or——

CRICHTON (*scandalised*). My Lord!

LORD LOAM (*loftily*). Then this is my last word to you; take a month's notice.

(*If the hut had a door he would now shut it to indicate that the interview is closed.*)

CRICHTON (*in great distress*). Your lordship, the disgrace——

LORD LOAM (*swelling*). Not another word: you may go.

LADY MARY (*adamant*). And don't come to me, Crichton, for a character.

ERNEST (*whose immersion has cleared his brain*). Aren't you all forgetting that this is an island?

(*This brings them to earth with a bump.* LORD LOAM *looks to his eldest daughter for the fitting response.*)

LADY MARY (*equal to the occasion*). It makes only this difference—that you may go at once, Crichton, to some other part of the island.

(*The faithful servant has been true to*

his superiors ever since he was created, and never more true than at this moment; but his fidelity is founded on trust in Nature, and to be untrue to it would be to be untrue to them. He lets the wood he has been gathering slip to the ground, and bows his sorrowful head. He turns to obey. Then affection for these great ones wells up in him.)

CRICHTON. My lady, let me work for you.

LADY MARY. Go.

CRICHTON. You need me so sorely; I can't desert you; I won't.

LADY MARY (*in alarm, lest the others may yield*). Then, father, there is but one alternative, *we* must leave him.

(LORD LOAM *is looking yearningly at* CRICHTON.)

TREHERNE. It seems a pity.

CATHERINE (*forlornly*). *You* will work for us?

TREHERNE. Most willingly. But I must warn you all that, so far, Crichton has done nine-tenths of the scoring.

LADY MARY. The question is, are we to leave this man?

LORD LOAM (*wrapping himself in his dignity*). Come, my dears.

CRICHTON. My lord!

LORD LOAM. Treherne—Ernest—get our things.

ERNEST. We don't have any, uncle. They all belong to Crichton.

TREHERNE. Everything we have he brought from the wreck—he went back to it before it sank. He risked his life.

CRICHTON. My lord, anything you would care to take is yours.

LADY MARY (*quickly*). Nothing.

ERNEST. Rot! If I could have your socks, Crichton——

LADY MARY. Come, father; we are ready.

(*Followed by the others, she and* LORD LOAM *pick their way up the rocks. In their indignation they scarcely notice that daylight is coming to a sudden end.*)

CRICHTON. My lord, I implore you—*I* am

not desirous of being head. Do you have a try at it, my lord.

LORD LOAM (*outraged*). A try at it!

CRICHTON (*eagerly*). It may be that you will prove to be the best man.

LORD LOAM. *May* be! My children, come.

(*They disappear proudly in single file.*)

TREHERNE. Crichton, I 'm sorry; but of course I must go with them.

CRICHTON. Certainly, sir.

(*He calls to* TWEENY, *and she comes from behind the hut, where she has been watching breathlessly.*)

Will you be so kind, sir, as to take her to the others?

TREHERNE. Assuredly.

TWEENY. But what do it all mean?

CRICHTON. Does, Tweeny, does. (*He passes her up the rocks to* TREHERNE.) We shall meet again soon, Tweeny. Good night, sir.

TREHERNE. Good night. I dare say they are not far away.

CRICHTON (*thoughtfully*). They went westward, sir, and the wind is blowing in that direction.

That may mean, sir, that Nature is already taking the matter into her own hands. They are all hungry, sir, and the pot has come a-boil. (*He takes off the lid.*) The smell will be borne westward. That pot is full of Nature, Mr. Treherne. Good night, sir.

TREHERNE. Good night.

(He mounts the rocks with TWEENY, *and they are heard for a little time after their figures are swallowed up in the fast growing darkness.* CRICHTON *stands motionless, the lid in his hand, though he has forgotten it, and his reason for taking it off the pot. He is deeply stirred, but presently is ashamed of his dejection, for it is as if he doubted his principles. Bravely true to his faith that Nature will decide now as ever before, he proceeds manfully with his preparations for the night. He lights a ship's lantern, one of several treasures he has brought ashore, and is filling his pipe with crumbs of tobacco from various pockets, when the stealthy movements of some animal in the grass startles him.*

With the lantern in one hand and his cutlass in the other, he searches the ground around the hut. He returns, lights his pipe, and sits down by the fire, which casts weird moving shadows. There is a red gleam on his face; in the darkness he is a strong and perhaps rather sinister figure. In the great stillness that has fallen over the land, the wash of the surf seems to have increased in volume. The sound is indescribably mournful. Except where the fire is, desolation has fallen on the island like a pall.

Once or twice, as Nature dictates, CRICHTON *leans forward to stir the pot, and the smell is borne westward. He then resumes his silent vigil.*

Shadows other than those cast by the fire begin to descend the rocks. They are the adventurers returning. One by one they steal nearer to the pot until they are squatted round it, with their hands out to the blaze. LADY MARY *only is absent. Presently she comes within sight of the*

others, then stands against a tree with her teeth clenched. One wonders, perhaps, what Nature is to make of her.)

End of Act II.

ACT III

ACT III

THE HAPPY HOME

The scene is the hall of their island home two years later. This sturdy log-house is no mere extension of the hut we have seen in process of erection, but has been built a mile or less to the west of it, on higher ground and near a stream. When the master chose this site, the others thought that all he expected from the stream was a sufficiency of drinking water. They know better now every time they go down to the mill or turn on the electric light.

This hall is the living-room of the house, and walls and roof are of stout logs. Across the joists supporting the roof are laid many home-made implements, such as spades, saws, fishing-rods, and from hooks in the joists are suspended cured foods, of which hams are specially in evidence. Deep recesses half way up the walls contain various provender in barrels and sacks. There are some skins, trophies of the chase, on the floor, which is otherwise bare. The chairs and tables are in some cases hewn out of the solid wood,

and in others the result of rough but efficient carpentering. Various pieces of wreckage from the yacht have been turned to novel uses: thus the steering-wheel now hangs from the centre of the roof, with electric lights attached to it encased in bladders. A lifebuoy has become the back of a chair. Two barrels have been halved and turn coyly from each other as a settee.

The farther end of the room is more strictly the kitchen, and is a great recess, which can be shut off from the hall by folding doors. There is a large open fire in it. The chimney is half of one of the boats of the yacht. On the walls of the kitchen proper are many plate-racks, containing shells; there are rows of these of one size and shape, which mark them off as dinner plates or bowls; others are as obviously tureens. They are arranged primly as in a well-conducted kitchen; indeed, neatness and cleanliness are the note struck everywhere, yet the effect of the whole is romantic and barbaric.

The outer door into this hall is a little peculiar on an island. It is covered with skins and is in four leaves, like the swing doors of fashionable restaurants, which allow you to enter without allowing the hot air to escape. During the winter season our castaways have found the contrivance useful, but Crichton's brain was perhaps a little lordly when he conceived

it. Another door leads by a passage to the sleeping-rooms of the house, which are all on the ground-floor, and to Crichton's work-room, where he is at this moment, and whither we should like to follow him, but in a play we may not, as it is out of sight. There is a large window space without a window, which, however, can be shuttered, and through this we have a view of cattle-sheds, fowl-pens, and a field of grain. It is a fine summer evening.

Tweeny is sitting there, very busy plucking the feathers off a bird and dropping them on a sheet placed for that purpose on the floor. She is trilling to herself in the lightness of her heart. We may remember that Tweeny, alone among the women, had dressed wisely for an island when they fled the yacht, and her going-away gown still adheres to her, though in fragments. A score of pieces have been added here and there as necessity compelled, and these have been patched and repatched in incongruous colours; but, when all is said and done, it can still be maintained that Tweeny wears a skirt. She is deservedly proud of her skirt, and sometimes lends it on important occasions when approached in the proper spirit.

Some one outside has been whistling to Tweeny; the guarded whistle which, on a less savage island, is sometimes assumed to be an indication to cook that

the constable is willing, if the coast be clear. Tweeny, however, is engrossed, or perhaps she is not in the mood for a follower, so he climbs in at the window undaunted, to take her willy nilly. He is a jolly-looking labouring man, who answers to the name of Daddy, and— But though that may be his island name, we recognise him at once. He is Lord Loam, settled down to the new conditions, and enjoying life heartily as handy-man about the happy home. He is comfortably attired in skins. He is still stout, but all the flabbiness has dropped from him; gone too is his pomposity; his eye is clear, brown his skin; he could leap a gate.

In his hands he carries an island-made concertina, and such is the exuberance of his spirits that, as he lights on the floor, he bursts into music and song, something about his being a chickety chickety chick chick, and will Tweeny please to tell him whose chickety chick is she. Retribution follows sharp. We hear a whir, as if from insufficiently oiled machinery, and over the passage door appears a placard showing the one word 'Silence.' His lordship stops, and steals to Tweeny on his tiptoes.

LORD LOAM. I thought the Gov. was out.

TWEENY. Well, you see he ain't. And if he were to catch you here idling——

(LORD LOAM *pales. He lays aside his musical instrument and hurriedly dons an apron.* TWEENY *gives him the bird to pluck, and busies herself laying the table for dinner.*)

LORD LOAM (*softly*). What is he doing now?

TWEENY. I think he 's working out that plan for laying on hot and cold.

LORD LOAM (*proud of his master*). And he 'll manage it too. The man who could build a blacksmith's forge without tools——

TWEENY (*not less proud*). He made the tools.

LORD LOAM. Out of half a dozen rusty nails. The saw-mill, Tweeny; the speaking-tube; the electric lighting; and look at the use he has made of the bits of the yacht that were washed ashore. And all in two years. He 's a master I 'm proud to pluck for.

(*He chirps happily at his work, and she regards him curiously.*)

TWEENY. Daddy, you 're of little use, but you 're a bright, cheerful creature to have about

the house. (*He beams at this commendation.*) Do you ever think of old times now? We was a bit different.

LORD LOAM (*pausing*). Circumstances alter cases.

(*He resumes his plucking contentedly.*)

TWEENY. But, Daddy, if the chance was to come of getting back?

LORD LOAM. I have given up bothering about it.

TWEENY. You bothered that day long ago when we saw a ship passing the island. How we all ran like crazy folk into the water, Daddy, and screamed and held out our arms. (*They are both a little agitated.*) But it sailed away, and we 've never seen another.

LORD LOAM. If we had had the electrical contrivance we have now we could have attracted that ship's notice. (*Their eyes rest on a mysterious apparatus that fills a corner of the hall.*) A touch on that lever, Tweeny, and in a few moments bonfires would be blazing all round the shore.

TWEENY (*backing from the lever as if it might*

spring at her). It 's the most wonderful thing he has done.

LORD LOAM (*in a reverie*). And then—England—home!

TWEENY (*also seeing visions*). London of a Saturday night!

LORD LOAM. My lords, in rising once more to address this historic chamber——

TWEENY. There was a little ham and beef shop off the Edgware Road——

(*The visions fade; they return to the practical.*)

LORD LOAM. Tweeny, do you think I could have an egg to my tea?

(*At this moment a wiry, athletic figure in skins darkens the window. He is carrying two pails, which are suspended from a pole on his shoulder, and he is* ERNEST. *We should say that he is* ERNEST *completely changed if we were of those who hold that people change. As he enters by the window he has heard* LORD LOAM'S *appeal, and is perhaps justifiably indignant.*)

ERNEST. What is that about an egg? Why should you have an egg?

LORD LOAM (*with hauteur*). That is my affair, sir. (*With a Parthian shot as he withdraws stiffly from the room.*) The Gov. has never put *my* head in a bucket.

ERNEST (*coming to rest on one of his buckets, and speaking with excusable pride. To* TWEENY). Nor mine for nearly three months. It was only last week, Tweeny, that he said to me, 'Ernest, the water cure has worked marvels in you, and I question whether I shall require to dip you any more.' (*Complacently.*) Of course that sort of thing encourages a fellow.

TWEENY (*who has now arranged the dinner table to her satisfaction*). I will say, Erny, I never seen a young chap more improved.

ERNEST (*gratified*). Thank you, Tweeny, that 's very precious to me.

(*She retires to the fire to work the great bellows with her foot, and* ERNEST *turns to* TREHERNE, *who has come in looking more like a cow-boy than a clergyman.*

He has a small box in his hand which he tries to conceal.)

What have you got there, John?

TREHERNE. Don't tell anybody. It is a little present for the Gov.; a set of razors. One for each day in the week.

ERNEST (*opening the box and examining its contents.*) Shells! He 'll like that. He likes sets of things.

TREHERNE (*in a guarded voice*). Have you noticed that?

ERNEST. Rather.

TREHERNE. He 's becoming a bit magnificent in his ideas.

ERNEST (*huskily*). John, it sometimes gives me the creeps.

TREHERNE (*making sure that* TWEENY *is out of hearing*). What do you think of that brilliant robe he got the girls to make for him.

ERNEST (*uncomfortably*). I think he looks too regal in it.

TREHERNE. Regal! I sometimes fancy that that 's why he 's so fond of wearing it. (*Prac-*

tically.) Well, I must take these down to the grindstone and put an edge on them.

ERNEST (*button-holing him*). I say, John, I want a word with you.

TREHERNE. Well?

ERNEST (*become suddenly diffident*). Dash it all, you know, you 're a clergyman.

TREHERNE. One of the best things the Gov. has done is to insist that none of you forget it.

ERNEST (*taking his courage in his hands*). Then—would you, John?

TREHERNE. What?

ERNEST (*wistfully*). Officiate at a marriage ceremony, John?

TREHERNE (*slowly*). Now, that 's really odd.

ERNEST. Odd? Seems to me it 's natural. And whatever is natural, John, is right.

TREHERNE. I mean that same question has been put to me to-day already.

ERNEST (*eagerly*). By one of the women?

TREHERNE. Oh no; they all put it to me long ago. This was by the Gov. himself.

ERNEST. By Jove! (*Admiringly.*) I say, John, what an observant beggar he is.

TREHERNE. Ah! You fancy he was thinking of you?

ERNEST. I do not hesitate to affirm, John, that he has seen the love-light in my eyes. You answered——

TREHERNE. I said Yes, I thought it would be my duty to officiate if called upon.

ERNEST. You 're a brick.

TREHERNE (*still pondering*). But I wonder whether he *was* thinking of you?

ERNEST. Make your mind easy about that.

TREHERNE. Well, my best wishes. Agatha is a very fine girl.

ERNEST. Agatha? What made you think it was Agatha?

TREHERNE. Man alive, you told me all about it soon after we were wrecked.

ERNEST. Pooh! Agatha 's all very well in her way, John, but I 'm flying at bigger game.

TREHERNE. Ernest, which is it?

ERNEST. Tweeny, of course.

TREHERNE. Tweeny? (*Reprovingly.*) Ernest, I hope her cooking has nothing to do with this.

ERNEST (*with dignity*). Her cooking has very little to do with it.

TREHERNE. But does she return your affection.

ERNEST (*simply*). Yes, John, I believe I may say so. I am unworthy of her, but I think I have touched her heart.

TREHERNE (*with a sigh*). Some people seem to have all the luck. As you know, Catherine won't look at me.

ERNEST. I 'm sorry, John.

TREHERNE. It 's my deserts; I 'm a second eleven sort of chap. Well, my heartiest good wishes, Ernest.

ERNEST. Thank you, John. How 's the little black pig to-day?

TREHERNE (*departing*). He has begun to eat again.

(*After a moment's reflection* ERNEST *calls to* TWEENY.)

ERNEST. Are you very busy, Tweeny?

TWEENY (*coming to him good-naturedly*). There 's always work to do; but if you want me, Ernest——

ERNEST. There 's something I should like to say to you if you could spare me a moment.

TWEENY. Willingly. What is it?

ERNEST. What an ass I used to be, Tweeny.

TWEENY (*tolerantly*). Oh, let bygones be bygones.

ERNEST (*sincerely, and at his very best*). I 'm no great shakes even now. But listen to this, Tweeny; I have known many women, but until I knew you I never knew any woman.

TWEENY (*to whose uneducated ears this sounds dangerously like an epigram*). Take care—the bucket.

ERNEST (*hurriedly*). I didn't mean it in that way. (*He goes chivalrously on his knees.*) Ah, Tweeny, I don't undervalue the bucket, but what I want to say now is that the sweet refinement of a dear girl has done more for me than any bucket could do.

TWEENY (*with large eyes*). Are you offering to walk out with me, Erny?

ERNEST (*passionately*). More than that. I want to build a little house for you—in the

sunny glade down by Porcupine Creek. I want to make chairs for you and tables; and knives and forks, and a sideboard for you.

TWEENY (*who is fond of language*). I like to hear you. (*Eyeing him.*) Would there be any one in the house except myself, Ernest?

ERNEST (*humbly*). Not often; but just occasionally there would be your adoring husband.

TWEENY (*decisively*). It won't do, Ernest.

ERNEST (*pleading*). It isn't as if I should be much there.

TWEENY. I know, I know; but I don't love you, Ernest. I 'm that sorry.

ERNEST (*putting his case cleverly*). Twice a week I should be away altogether—at the dam. On the other days you would never see me from breakfast time to supper.

(*With the self-abnegation of the true lover.*)

If you like I 'll even go fishing on Sundays.

TWEENY. It 's no use, Erny.

ERNEST (*rising manfully*). Thank you, Tweeny; it can't be helped. (*Then he re-*

members.) Tweeny, we shall be disappointing the Gov.

TWEENY (*with a sinking*). What 's that?

ERNEST. He wanted us to marry.

TWEENY (*blankly*). You and me? the Gov.! (*Her head droops woefully. From without is heard the whistling of a happier spirit, and* TWEENY *draws herself up fiercely.*) That 's her; that 's the thing what has stole his heart from me.

(*A stalwart youth appears at the window, so handsome and tingling with vitality that, glad to depose* CRICHTON, *we cry thankfully, 'The hero at last.' But it is not the hero; it is the heroine. This splendid boy, clad in skins, is what Nature has done for* LADY MARY. *She carries bow and arrows and a blow-pipe, and over her shoulder is a fat buck, which she drops with a cry of triumph. Forgetting to enter demurely, she leaps through the window.*)

(*Sourly.*) Drat you, Polly, why don't you wipe your feet?

LADY MARY (*good-naturedly*). Come, Tweeny, be nice to me. It 's a splendid buck.

(*But* TWEENY *shakes her off, and retires to the kitchen fire.*)

ERNEST. Where did you get it?

LADY MARY (*gaily*). I sighted a herd near Penguin's Creek, but had to creep round Silver Lake to get to windward of them. However, they spotted me and then the fun began. There was nothing for it but to try and run them down, so I singled out a fat buck and away we went down the shore of the lake, up the valley of rolling stones; he doubled into Brawling River and took to the water, but I swam after him; the river is only half a mile broad there, but it runs strong. He went spinning down the rapids, down I went in pursuit; he clambered ashore, I clambered ashore; away we tore helter-skelter up the hill and down again. I lost him in the marshes, got on his track again near Bread Fruit Wood, and brought him down with an arrow in Firefly Grove.

TWEENY (*staring at her*). Aren't you tired?

LADY MARY. Tired! It was gorgeous.

(*She runs up a ladder and deposits her weapons on the joists. She is whistling again.*)

TWEENY (*snapping*). I can't abide a woman whistling.

LADY MARY (*indifferently*). I like it.

TWEENY (*stamping her foot*). Drop it, Polly, I tell you.

LADY MARY (*stung*). I won't. I 'm as good as you are.

(*They are facing each other defiantly.*)

ERNEST (*shocked*). Is this necessary? Think how it would pain *him*.

(LADY MARY'S *eyes take a new expression. We see them soft for the first time.*)

LADY MARY (*contritely*). Tweeny, I beg your pardon. If my whistling annoys you, I shall try to cure myself of it.

(*Instead of calming* TWEENY, *this floods her face in tears.*)

Why, how can that hurt you, Tweeny dear?

TWEENY. Because I can't make you lose your temper.

LADY MARY (*divinely*). Indeed, I often do. Would that I were nicer to everybody.

TWEENY. There you are again. (*Wistfully.*) What makes you want to be so nice, Polly?

LADY MARY (*with fervour*). Only thankfulness, Tweeny. (*She exults.*) It is such fun to be alive.

(*So also seem to think* CATHERINE *and* AGATHA, *who bounce in with fishing-rods and creel. They, too, are in manly attire.*)

CATHERINE. We 've got some ripping fish for the Gov.'s dinner. Are we in time? We ran all the way.

TWEENY (*tartly*). You 'll please to cook them yourself, Kitty, and look sharp about it.

(*She retires to her hearth, where* AGATHA *follows her.*)

AGATHA (*yearning*). Has the Gov. decided who is to wait upon him to-day?

CATHERINE (*who is cleaning her fish*). It 's my turn.

AGATHA (*hotly*). I don't see that.

TWEENY (*with bitterness*). It 's to be neither of you, Aggy; he wants Polly again.

(LADY MARY *is unable to resist a joyous whistle.*)

AGATHA (*jealously*). Polly, you toad.

(*But they cannot make* LADY MARY *angry.*)

TWEENY (*storming*). How dare you look so happy?

LADY MARY (*willing to embrace her*). I wish, Tweeny, there was anything I could do to make you happy also.

TWEENY. Me! Oh, I 'm happy. (*She remembers* ERNEST, *whom it is easy to forget on an island.*) I 've just had a proposal, I tell you.

(LADY MARY *is shaken at last, and her sisters with her.*)

AGATHA. A proposal?

CATHERINE (*going white*). Not—not——

(*She dare not say his name.*)

ERNEST (*with singular modesty*). You needn't be alarmed; it 's only me.

LADY MARY (*relieved*). Oh, you!

AGATHA (*happy again*). Ernest, you dear, I got such a shock.

CATHERINE. It was only Ernest. (*Showing him her fish in thankfulness.*) They are beautifully fresh; come and help me to cook them.

ERNEST (*with simple dignity*). Do you mind if I don't cook fish to-night? (*She does not mind in the least. They have all forgotten him. A lark is singing in three hearts.*) I think you might all be a little sorry for a chap. (*But they are not even sorry, and he addresses* AGATHA *in these winged words:*) I 'm particularly disappointed in you, Aggy; seeing that I was half engaged to you, I think you might have had the good feeling to be a little more hurt.

AGATHA. Oh, bother.

ERNEST (*summing up the situation in so far as it affects himself*). I shall now go and lie down for a bit.

(*He retires coldly but unregretted.* LADY MARY *approaches* TWEENY *with her most insinuating smile.*)

LADY MARY. Tweeny, as the Gov. has chosen me to wait on him, please may I have the loan of *it* again?

(*The reference made with such charming delicacy is evidently to* TWEENY'S *skirt.*)

TWEENY (*doggedly*). No, you mayn't.

AGATHA (*supporting* TWEENY). Don't you give it to her.

LADY MARY (*still trying sweet persuasion*). You know quite well that he prefers to be waited on in a skirt.

TWEENY. I don't care. Get one for yourself.

LADY MARY. It is the only one on the island.

TWEENY. And it 's mine.

LADY MARY (*an aristocrat after all*). Tweeny, give me that skirt directly.

CATHERINE. Don't.

TWEENY. I won't.

LADY MARY (*clearing for action*). I shall make you.

TWEENY. I should like to see you try.

(*An unseemly fracas appears to be inevitable, but something happens. The whir is again heard, and the notice is displayed 'Dogs delight to bark and bite.' Its effect is instantaneous and cheering. The ladies look at each other guiltily and im-*

mediately proceed on tiptoe to their duties. These are all concerned with the master's dinner. CATHERINE *attends to his fish.* AGATHA *fills a quaint toast-rack and brings the menu, which is written on a shell.* LADY MARY *twists a wreath of green leaves around her head, and places a flower beside the master's plate.* TWEENY *signs that all is ready, and she and the younger sisters retire into the kitchen, drawing the screen that separates it from the rest of the room.* LADY MARY *beats a tom-tom, which is the dinner bell. She then gently works a punkah, which we have not hitherto observed, and stands at attention. No doubt she is in hopes that the Gov. will enter into conversation with her, but she is too good a parlour-maid to let her hopes appear in her face. We may watch her manner with complete approval. There is not one of us who would not give her £26 a year.*

The master comes in quietly, a book in his hand, still the only book on the island,

for he has not thought it worth while to build a printing-press. His dress is not noticeably different from that of the others, the skins are similar, but perhaps these are a trifle more carefully cut or he carries them better. One sees somehow that he has changed for his evening meal. There is an odd suggestion of a dinner jacket about his doeskin coat. It is, perhaps, too grave a face for a man of thirty-two, as if he were over much immersed in affairs, yet there is a sunny smile left to lighten it at times and bring back its youth; perhaps too intellectual a face to pass as strictly handsome, not sufficiently suggestive of oats. His tall figure is very straight, slight rather than thick-set, but nobly muscular. His big hands, firm and hard with labour though they be, are finely shaped—note the fingers so much more tapered, the nails better tended than those of his domestics; they are one of many indications that he is of a superior breed. Such signs, as has often been

pointed out, are infallible. A romantic figure, too. One can easily see why the women-folks of this strong man's house both adore and fear him.

He does not seem to notice who is waiting on him to-night, but inclines his head slightly to whoever it is, as she takes her place at the back of his chair. LADY MARY *respectfully places the menu-shell before him, and he glances at it.)*

CRICHTON. Clear, please.

(LADY MARY *knocks on the screen, and a serving hutch in it opens, through which* TWEENY *offers two soup plates.* LADY MARY *selects the clear, and the aperture is closed. She works the punkah while the master partakes of the soup.)*

CRICHTON (*who always gives praise where it is due*). An excellent soup, Polly, but still a trifle too rich.

LADY MARY. Thank you.

(*The next course is the fish, and while it is being passed through the hutch we have a glimpse of three jealous women.*

LADY MARY'S *movements are so deft and noiseless that any observant spectator can see that she was born to wait at table.*)

CRICHTON (*unbending as he eats*). Polly, you are a very smart girl.

LADY MARY (*brindling, but naturally gratified*). La!

CRICHTON (*smiling*). And I 'm not the first you 've heard it from, I 'll swear.

LADY MARY (*wriggling*). Oh Gov.!

CRICHTON. Got any followers on the island, Polly?

LADY MARY (*tossing her head*). Certainly not.

CRICHTON. I thought that perhaps John or Ernest——

LADY MARY (*tilting her nose*). I don't say that it 's for want of asking.

CRICHTON (*emphatically*). I 'm sure it isn't.

(*Perhaps he thinks he has gone too far.*) You may clear.

(*Flushed with pleasure, she puts before him a bird and vegetables, sees that his beaker is filled with wine, and returns to the punkah. She would love to continue*

their conversation, but it is for him to decide. For a time he seems to have forgotten her.)

CRICHTON. Did you lose any arrows to-day?

LADY MARY. Only one in Firefly Grove.

CRICHTON. You were as far as that? How did you get across the Black Gorge?

LADY MARY. I went across on the rope.

CRICHTON. Hand over hand?

LADY MARY (*swelling at the implied praise*). I wasn't in the least dizzy.

CRICHTON (*moved*). You brave girl! (*He sits back in his chair a little agitated.*) But never do that again.

LADY MARY (*pouting*). It is such fun, Gov.

CRICHTON (*decisively*). I forbid it.

LADY MARY (*the little rebel*). I shall.

CRICHTON (*surprised*). Polly!

(He signs to her sharply to step forward, but for a moment she holds back petulantly, and even when she does come it is less obediently than like a naughty, sulky child. Nevertheless, with the forbearance that is characteristic of the man, he addresses

her with grave gentleness rather than severely.)

You must do as I tell you, you know.

LADY MARY (*strangely passionate*). I shan't.

CRICHTON (*smiling at her fury*). We shall see. Frown at me, Polly; there, you do it at once. Clench your little fists, stamp your feet, bite your ribbons——

(*A student of women, or at least of this woman, he knows that she is about to do those things, and thus she seems to do them to order.* LADY MARY *screws up her face like a baby and cries. He is immediately kind.*)

You child of Nature; was it cruel of me to wish to save you from harm?

LADY MARY (*drying her eyes*). I 'm an ungracious wretch. Oh Gov., I don't try half hard enough to please you. I 'm even wearing—(*she looks down sadly*)—when I know you prefer *it*.

CRICHTON (*thoughtfully*). I admit I do prefer *it*. Perhaps I am a little old-fashioned in these matters.

(*Her tears again threaten.*)

Ah, don't, Polly; that 's nothing.

LADY MARY. If I could only please you, Gov.

CRICHTON (*slowly*). You do please me, child, very much—(*he half rises*)—very much indeed. (*If he meant to say more he checks himself. He looks at his plate.*) No more, thank you.

(*The simple island meal is ended, save for the walnuts and the wine, and* CRICHTON *is too busy a man to linger long over them. But he is a stickler for etiquette, and the table is cleared charmingly, though with dispatch, before they are placed before him.* LADY MARY *is an artist with the crumb-brush, and there are few arts more delightful to watch. Dusk has come sharply, and she turns on the electric light. It awakens* CRICHTON *from a reverie in which he has been regarding her.*)

CRICHTON. Polly, there is only one thing about you that I don't quite like.

(*She looks up, making a* moue, *if that can be said of one who so well knows her place. He explains.*)

That action of the hands.

LADY MARY. What do I do?

CRICHTON. So—like one washing them. I have noticed that the others tend to do it also. It seems odd.

LADY MARY (*archly*). Oh Gov., have you forgotten?

CRICHTON. What?

LADY MARY. That once upon a time a certain other person did that.

CRICHTON (*groping*). You mean myself? (*She nods, and he shudders.*) Horrible!

LADY MARY (*afraid she has hurt him*). You haven't for a very long time. Perhaps it is natural to servants.

CRICHTON. That must be it. (*He rises.*) Polly! (*She looks up expectantly, but he only sighs and turns away.*)

LADY MARY (*gently*). You sighed, Gov.

CRICHTON. Did I? I was thinking. (*He paces the room and then turns to her agitatedly, yet with control over his agitation. There is some mournfulness in his voice.*) I have always tried to do the right thing on this island. Above all, Polly, I want to do the right thing by you.

LADY MARY (*with shining eyes*). How we all trust you. That is your reward, Gov.

CRICHTON (*who is having a fight with himself*). And now I want a greater reward. Is it fair to you? Am I playing the game? Bill Crichton would like always to play the game. If we were in England——

(*He pauses so long that she breaks in softly.*)

LADY MARY. We know now that we shall never see England again.

CRICHTON. I am thinking of two people whom neither of us has seen for a long time—Lady Mary Lasenby, and one Crichton, a butler.

(*He says the last word bravely, a word he once loved, though it is the most horrible of all words to him now.*)

LADY MARY. That cold, haughty, insolent girl. Gov., look around you and forget them both.

CRICHTON. I had nigh forgotten them. He has had a chance, Polly—that butler—in these two years of becoming a man, and he has tried

to take it. There have been many failures, but there has been some success, and with it I have let the past drop off me, and turned my back on it. That butler seems a far-away figure to me now, and not myself. I hail him, but we scarce know each other. If I am to bring him back it can only be done by force, for in my soul he is now abhorrent to me. But if I thought it best for you I 'd haul him back; I swear as an honest man, I would bring him back with all his obsequious ways and deferential airs, and let you see the man you call your Gov. melt for ever into him who was your servant.

LADY MARY (*shivering*). You hurt me. You say these things, but you say them like a king. To me it is the past that was not real.

CRICHTON (*too grandly*). A king! I sometimes feel——

(*For a moment the yellow light gleams in his green eyes. We remember suddenly what* TREHERNE *and* ERNEST *said about his regal look. He checks himself.*)

I say it harshly, it is so hard to say, and all

the time there is another voice within me crying—— (*He stops.*)

LADY MARY (*trembling but not afraid*). If it is the voice of Nature——

CRICHTON (*strongly*). I know it to be the voice of Nature.

LADY MARY (*in a whisper*). Then, if you want to say it very much, Gov., please say it to Polly Lasenby.

CRICHTON (*again in the grip of an idea*). A king! Polly, some people hold that the soul but leaves one human tenement for another, and so lives on through all the ages. I have occasionally thought of late that, in some past existence, I may have been a king. It has all come to me so naturally, not as if I had had to work it out, but—as—if—I—remembered.

> 'Or ever the knightly years were gone,
> With the old world to the grave,
> I was a *king* in Babylon,
> And you were a Christian slave.'

It may have been; you hear me, it may have been.

LADY MARY (*who is as one fascinated*). It may have been.

CRICHTON. I am lord over all. They are but hewers of wood and drawers of water for me. These shores are mine. Why should I hesitate; I have no longer any doubt. I do believe I am doing the right thing. Dear Polly, I have grown to love you; are you afraid to mate with me? (*She rocks her arms; no words will come from her.*)

'I was a king in Babylon,
And you were a Christian slave.'

LADY MARY (*bewitched*). You are the most wonderful man I have ever known, and I am not afraid.

(*He takes her to him reverently. Presently he is seated, and she is at his feet looking up adoringly in his face. As the tension relaxes she speaks with a smile.*)

I want you to tell me—every woman likes to know—when was the first time you thought me nicer than the others?

CRICHTON (*who, like all big men, is simple*). I think a year ago. We were chasing goats on the Big Slopes, and you out-distanced us all; you

were the first of our party to run a goat down; I was proud of you that day.

LADY MARY (*blushing with pleasure*). Oh Gov., I only did it to please you. Everything I have done has been out of the desire to please you. (*Suddenly anxious.*) If I thought that in taking a wife from among us you were imperilling your dignity——

CRICHTON (*perhaps a little masterful*). Have no fear of that, dear. I have thought it all out. The wife, Polly, always takes the same position as the husband.

LADY MARY. But I am so unworthy. It was sufficient to me that I should be allowed to wait on you at that table.

CRICHTON. You shall wait on me no longer. At whatever table I sit, Polly, you shall soon sit there also. (*Boyishly.*) Come, let us try what it will be like.

LADY MARY. As your servant at your feet.

CRICHTON. No, as my consort by my side.

(*They are sitting thus when the hatch is again opened and coffee offered. But* LADY MARY *is no longer there to receive*

it. Her sisters peep through in consternation. In vain they rattle the cup and saucer. AGATHA *brings the coffee to* CRICHTON.)

CRICHTON (*forgetting for the moment that it is not a month hence*). Help your mistress first, girl. (*Three women are bereft of speech, but he does not notice it. He addresses* CATHERINE *vaguely.*) Are you a good girl, Kitty?

CATHERINE (*when she finds her tongue*). I try to be, Gov.

CRICHTON (*still more vaguely*). That 's right. (*He takes command of himself again, and signs to them to sit down.* ERNEST *comes in cheerily, but finding* CRICHTON *here is suddenly weak. He subsides on a chair, wondering what has happened.*)

CRICHTON (*surveying him*). Ernest. (ERNEST *rises.*) You are becoming a little slovenly in your dress, Ernest; I don't like it.

ERNEST (*respectfully*). Thank you. (ERNEST *sits again.* DADDY *and* TREHERNE *arrive.*)

CRICHTON. Daddy, I want you.

LORD LOAM (*with a sinking*). Is it because I forgot to clean out the dam?

CRICHTON (*encouragingly*). No, no. (*He pours some wine into a goblet.*) A glass of wine with you, Daddy.

LORD LOAM (*hastily*). Your health, Gov.

(*He is about to drink, but the master checks him.*)

CRICHTON. And hers. Daddy, this lady has done me the honour to promise to be my wife.

LORD LOAM (*astounded*). Polly!

CRICHTON (*a little perturbed*). I ought first to have asked your consent. I deeply regret—but Nature; may I hope I have your approval?

LORD LOAM. May you, Gov.? (*Delighted.*) Rather! Polly!

(*He puts his proud arms round her.*)

TREHERNE. We all congratulate you, Gov., most heartily.

ERNEST. Long life to you both, sir.

(*There is much shaking of hands, all of which is sincere.*)

TREHERNE. When will it be, Gov.?

CRICHTON (*after turning to* LADY MARY, *who whispers to him*). As soon as the bridal skirt can be prepared. (*His manner has been most*

indulgent, and without the slightest suggestion of patronage. But he knows it is best for all that he should keep his place, and that his presence hampers them.) My friends, I thank you for your good wishes, I thank you all. And now, perhaps you would like me to leave you to yourselves. Be joyous. Let there be song and dance to-night. Polly, I shall take my coffee in the parlour—you understand.

(*He retires with pleasant dignity. Immediately there is a rush of two girls at* LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY. Oh, oh! Father, they are pinching me.

LORD LOAM (*taking her under his protection*). Agatha, Catherine, never presume to pinch your sister again. On the other hand, she may pinch you henceforth as much as ever she chooses.

(*In the meantime* TWEENY *is weeping softly, and the two are not above using her as a weapon.*)

CATHERINE. Poor Tweeny, it 's a shame.

AGATHA. After he had almost promised *you.*

TWEENY (*loyally turning on them*). No, he never did. He was always honourable as could be. 'Twas me as was too vulgar. Don't you dare say a word agin that man.

ERNEST (*to* LORD LOAM). You 'll get a lot of tit-bits out of this, Daddy.

LORD LOAM. That 's what I was thinking.

ERNEST (*plunged in thought*). I dare say *I* shall have to clean out the dam now.

LORD LOAM (*heartlessly*). I dare say.

(*His gay old heart makes him again proclaim that he is a chickety chick. He seizes the concertina.*)

TREHERNE (*eagerly*). That 's the proper spirit.

(*He puts his arm round* CATHERINE, *and in another moment they are all dancing to Daddy's music. Never were people happier on an island. A moment's pause is presently created by the return of* CRICHTON, *wearing the wonderful robe of which we have already had dark mention. Never has he looked more regal, never perhaps felt so regal. We need not grudge*

him the one foible of his rule, for it is all coming to an end.)

CRICHTON (*graciously, seeing them hesitate*). No, no; I am delighted to see you all so happy. Go on.

TREHERNE. We don't like to before you, Gov.

CRICHTON (*his last order*). It is my wish.

(*The merrymaking is resumed, and soon* CRICHTON *himself joins in the dance. It is when the fun is at its fastest and most furious that all stop abruptly as if turned to stone. They have heard the boom of a gun. Presently they are alive again.* ERNEST *leaps to the window.*)

TREHERNE (*huskily*). It was a ship's gun. (*They turn to* CRICHTON *for confirmation; even in that hour they turn to* CRICHTON.) Gov.?

CRICHTON. Yes.

(*In another moment* LADY MARY *and* LORD LOAM *are alone.*)

LADY MARY (*seeing that her father is unconcerned*). Father, you heard.

LORD LOAM (*placidly*). Yes, my child.

LADY MARY (*alarmed by his unnatural calmness*). But it was a gun, father.

LORD LOAM (*looking an old man now, and shuddering a little*). Yes—a gun—I have often heard it. It 's only a dream, you know; why don't we go on dancing?

(*She takes his hands, which have gone cold.*)

LADY MARY. Father. Don't you see, they have all rushed down to the beach? Come.

LORD LOAM. Rushed down to the beach; yes, always that—I often dream it.

LADY MARY. Come, father, come.

LORD LOAM. Only a dream, my poor girl.

(CRICHTON *returns. He is pale but firm.*)

CRICHTON. We can see lights within a mile of the shore—a great ship.

LORD LOAM. A ship—always a ship.

LADY MARY. Father, this is no dream.

LORD LOAM (*looking timidly at* CRICHTON). It 's a dream, isn't it? There 's no ship?

CRICHTON (*soothing him with a touch*). You are awake, Daddy, and there is a ship.

LORD LOAM (*clutching him*). You are not deceiving me?

CRICHTON. It is the truth.

LORD LOAM (*reeling*). True?—a ship—at last!

(*He goes after the others pitifully.*)

CRICHTON (*quietly*). There is a small boat between it and the island; they must have sent it ashore for water.

LADY MARY. Coming in?

CRICHTON. No. That gun must have been a signal to recall it. It is going back. They can't hear our cries.

LADY MARY (*pressing her temples*). Going away. So near—so near. (*Almost to herself.*) I think I 'm glad.

CRICHTON (*cheerily*). Have no fear. I shall bring them back.

(*He goes towards the table on which is the electrical apparatus.*)

LADY MARY (*standing on guard as it were between him and the table*). What are you going to do?

CRICHTON. To fire the beacons.

LADY MARY. Stop! (*She faces him.*) Don't you see what it means?

CRICHTON (*firmly*). It means that our life on the island has come to a natural end.

LADY MARY (*huskily*). Gov., let the ship go.

CRICHTON. The old man—you saw what it means to him.

LADY MARY. But I am afraid.

CRICHTON (*adoringly*). Dear Polly.

LADY MARY. Gov., let the ship go.

CRICHTON (*she clings to him, but though it is his death sentence he loosens her hold*). Bill Crichton has got to play the game.

(*He pulls the levers. Soon through the window one of the beacons is seen flaring red. There is a long pause. Shouting is heard.* ERNEST *is the first to arrive.*)

ERNEST. Polly, Gov., the boat has turned back. They are English sailors; they have landed! We are rescued, I tell you, rescued!

LADY MARY (*wanly*). Is it anything to make so great a to-do about?

ERNEST (*staring*). Eh?

LADY MARY. Have we not been happy here?

ERNEST. Happy? lord, yes.

LADY MARY (*catching hold of his sleeve*). Ernest, we must never forget all that the Gov. has done for us.

ERNEST (*stoutly*). Forget it? The man who could forget it would be a selfish wretch and a—— But I say, this makes a difference!

LADY MARY (*quickly*). No, it doesn't.

ERNEST (*his mind tottering*). A mighty difference!

(*The others come running in, some weeping with joy, others boisterous. We see blue-jackets gazing through the window at the curious scene.* LORD LOAM *comes accompanied by a naval officer, whom he is continually shaking by the hand.*)

LORD LOAM. And here, sir, is our little home. Let me thank you in the name of us all, again and again and again.

OFFICER. Very proud, my lord. It is indeed an honour to have been able to assist so distinguished a gentleman as Lord Loam.

LORD LOAM. A glorious, glorious day. I

shall show you our other room. Come, my pets. Come, Crichton.

(*He has not meant to be cruel. He does not know he has said it. It is the old life that has come back to him. They all go. All leave* CRICHTON *except* LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY (*stretching out her arms to him*). Dear Gov., I will never give you up.

(*There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes his head to her. He lets the cloak slip to the ground. She will not take this for an answer; again her arms go out to him. Then comes the great renunciation. By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.*)

CRICHTON (*it is the speech of his life*). My lady.

(*She goes away. There is none to salute him now, unless we do it.*)

End of Act III.

ACT IV

ACT IV

THE OTHER ISLAND

Some months have elapsed, and we have again the honour of waiting upon Lord Loam in his London home. It is the room of the first act, but with a new scheme of decoration, for on the walls are exhibited many interesting trophies from the island, such as skins, stuffed birds, and weapons of the chase, labelled 'Shot by Lord Loam,' 'Hon. Ernest Woolley's Blow-pipe,' etc. There are also two large glass cases containing other odds and ends, including, curiously enough, the bucket in which Ernest was first dipped, but there is no label calling attention to the incident.

It is not yet time to dress for dinner, and his lordship is on a couch, hastily yet furtively cutting the pages of a new book. With him are his two younger daughters and his nephew, and they also are engaged in literary pursuits; that is to say, the ladies are eagerly but furtively reading the evening papers, of which Ernest is sitting complacently but furtively on an endless number, and doling them out as called for. Note the frequent use of the word 'furtive.' It implies that

they do not wish to be discovered by their butler, say, at their otherwise delightful task.

AGATHA (*reading aloud, with emphasis on the wrong words*). 'In conclusion, we most heartily congratulate the Hon. Ernest Woolley. This book of his, regarding the adventures of himself and his brave companions on a desert isle, stirs the heart like a trumpet.'

(*Evidently the book referred to is the one in* LORD LOAM'S *hands.*)

ERNEST (*handing her a pink paper*). Here is another.

CATHERINE (*reading*). 'From the first to the last of Mr. Woolley's engrossing pages it is evident that he was an ideal man to be wrecked with, and a true hero.' (*Large-eyed.*) Ernest!

ERNEST (*calmly*). That 's how it strikes *them*, you know. Here 's another one.

AGATHA (*reading*). 'There are many kindly references to the two servants who were wrecked with the family, and Mr. Woolley pays the butler a glowing tribute in a footnote.'

(*Some one coughs uncomfortably.*)

LORD LOAM (*who has been searching the index for the letter L*). Excellent, excellent. At the same time I must say, Ernest, that the whole book is about yourself.

ERNEST (*genially*). As the author——

LORD LOAM. Certainly, certainly. Still, you know, as a peer of the realm—(*with dignity*)—I think, Ernest, you might have given me one of your adventures.

ERNEST. I say it was you who taught us how to obtain a fire by rubbing two pieces of stick together.

LORD LOAM (*beaming*). Do you, do you? I call that very handsome. What page?

(*Here the door opens, and the well-bred* CRICHTON *enters with the evening papers as subscribed for by the house. Those we have already seen have perhaps been introduced by* ERNEST *up his waistcoat. Every one except the intruder is immediately self-conscious, and when he withdraws there is a general sigh of relief. They pounce on the new papers.* ERNEST *evidently gets a shock from one,*

which he casts contemptuously on the floor.)

AGATHA (*more fortunate*). Father, see page 81. 'It was a tiger-cat,' says Mr. Woolley, 'of the largest size. Death stared Lord Loam in the face, but he never flinched.'

LORD LOAM (*searching his book eagerly*). Page 81.

AGATHA. 'With presence of mind only equalled by his courage, he fixed an arrow in his bow.'

LORD LOAM. Thank you, Ernest; thank you, my boy.

AGATHA. 'Unfortunately he missed.'

LORD LOAM. Eh?

AGATHA. 'But by great good luck I heard his cries'——

LORD LOAM. My cries?

AGATHA. —'and rushing forward with drawn knife, I stabbed the monster to the heart.'

(LORD LOAM *shuts his book with a pettish slam. There might be a scene here were it not that* CRICHTON *reappears and goes*

to one of the glass cases. All are at once on the alert, and his lordship is particularly sly.)

LORD LOAM. Anything in the papers, Catherine?

CATHERINE. No, father, nothing—nothing at all.

ERNEST (*it pops out as of yore*). The papers! The papers are guides that tell us what we ought to do, and then we don't do it.

(CRICHTON *having opened the glass case has taken out the bucket, and* ERNEST, *looking round for applause, sees him carrying it off and is undone. For a moment of time he forgets that he is no longer on the island, and with a sigh he is about to follow* CRICHTON *and the bucket to a retired spot. The door closes, and* ERNEST *comes to himself.*)

LORD LOAM (*uncomfortably*). I told him to take it away.

ERNEST. I thought—(*he wipes his brow*)—I shall go and dress.

(*He goes.*)

CATHERINE. Father, it 's awful having Crichton here. It 's like living on tiptoe.

LORD LOAM (*gloomily*). While he is here we are sitting on a volcano.

AGATHA. How mean of you! I am sure he has only stayed on with us to—to help us through. It would have looked so suspicious if he had gone at once.

CATHERINE (*revelling in the worst*). But suppose Lady Brocklehurst were to get at him and pump him. She 's the most terrifying, suspicious old creature in England; and Crichton simply can't tell a lie.

LORD LOAM. My dear, that is the volcano to which I was referring. (*He has evidently something to communicate.*) It 's all Mary's fault. She said to me yesterday that she would break her engagement with Brocklehurst unless I told him about—you know what.

(*All conjure up the vision of* CRICHTON.)

AGATHA. Is she mad?

LORD LOAM. She calls it common honesty.

CATHERINE. Father, have you told him?

LORD LOAM (*heavily*). She thinks I have, but I couldn't. She 's sure to find out to-night.

(*Unconsciously he leans on the island concertina, which he has perhaps been lately showing to an interviewer as something he made for* TWEENY. *It squeaks, and they all jump.*)

CATHERINE. It 's like a bird of ill-omen.

LORD LOAM (*vindictively*). I must have it taken away; it has done that twice.

(LADY MARY *comes in. She is in evening dress. Undoubtedly she meant to sail in, but she forgets, and despite her garments it is a manly entrance. She is properly ashamed of herself. She tries again, and has an encouraging success. She indicates to her sisters that she wishes to be alone with papa.*)

AGATHA. All right, but we know what it 's about. Come along, Kit.

(*They go.* LADY MARY *thoughtlessly sits like a boy, and again corrects herself. She addresses her father, but he is in a brown study, and she seeks to draw his*

attention by whistling. This troubles them both.)

LADY MARY. How horrid of me!

LORD LOAM (*depressed*). If you would try to remember——

LADY MARY (*sighing*). I do; but there are so many things to remember.

LORD LOAM (*sympathetically*). There are—(*in a whisper*). Do you know, Mary, I constantly find myself secreting hairpins.

LADY MARY. I find it so difficult to go up steps one at a time.

LORD LOAM. I was dining with half a dozen members of our party last Thursday, Mary, and they were so eloquent that I couldn't help wondering all the time how many of their heads *he* would have put in the bucket.

LADY MARY. I use so many of his phrases. And my appetite is so scandalous. Father, I usually have a chop before we sit down to dinner.

LORD LOAM. As for my clothes—(*wriggling*). My dear, you can't think how irksome collars are to me nowadays.

LADY MARY. They can't be half such an annoyance, father, as——

(*She looks dolefully at her skirt.*)

LORD LOAM (*hurriedly*). Quite so—quite so. You have dressed early to-night, Mary.

LADY MARY. That reminds me; I had a note from Brocklehurst saying that he would come a few minutes before his mother as—as he wanted to have a talk with me. He didn't say what about, but of course we know.

(*His lordship fidgets.*)

(*With feeling.*) It was good of you to tell him, father. Oh, it is horrible to me—(*covering her face*). It seemed so natural at the time.

LORD LOAM (*petulantly*). Never again make use of that word in this house, Mary.

LADY MARY (*with an effort*). Father, Brocklehurst has been so loyal to me for these two years that I should despise myself were I to keep my—my extraordinary lapse from him. Had Brocklehurst been a little less good, then you need not have told him my strange little secret.

LORD LOAM (*weakly*). Polly—I mean Mary—it was all Crichton's fault, he——

LADY MARY (*with decision*). No, father, no; not a word against him though. I haven't the pluck to go on with it; I can't even understand how it ever was. Father, do you not still hear the surf? Do you see the curve of the beach?

LORD LOAM. I have begun to forget—(*in a low voice*). But they were happy days; there was something magical about them.

LADY MARY. It was glamour. Father, I have lived Arabian nights. I have sat out a dance with the evening star. But it was all in a past existence, in the days of Babylon, and I am myself again. But he has been chivalrous always. If the slothful, indolent creature I used to be has improved in any way, I owe it all to him. I am slipping back in many ways, but I am determined not to slip back altogether—in memory of him and his island. That is why I insisted on your telling Brocklehurst. He can break our engagement if he chooses. (*Proudly.*) Mary Lasenby is going to play the game.

LORD LOAM. But my dear——

(LORD BROCKLEHURST *is announced.*)

LADY MARY (*meaningly*). Father, dear, oughtn't you to be dressing?

LORD LOAM (*very unhappy*). The fact is—before I go—I want to say——

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Loam, if you don't mind, I wish very specially to have a word with Mary before dinner.

LORD LOAM. But——

LADY MARY. Yes, father.

(*She induces him to go, and thus courageously faces* LORD BROCKLEHURST *to hear her fate.*)

I am ready, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*who is so agitated that she ought to see he is thinking not of her but of himself*). It is a painful matter—I wish I could have spared you this, Mary.

LADY MARY. Please go on.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. In common fairness, of course, this should be remembered, that two years had elapsed. You and I had no reason to believe that we should ever meet again.

(*This is more considerate than she had expected.*)

LADY MARY (*softening*). I was so lost to the world, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*with a groan*). At the same time, the thing is utterly and absolutely inexcusable——

LADY MARY (*recovering her hauteur*). Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. And so I have already said to mother.

LADY MARY (*disdaining him*). You have told her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Certainly, Mary, certainly; I tell mother everything.

LADY MARY (*curling her lip*). And what did she say?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. To tell the truth, mother rather pooh-poohed the whole affair.

LADY MARY (*incredulous*). Lady Brocklehurst pooh-poohed the whole affair!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She said, 'Mary and I will have a good laugh over this.'

LADY MARY (*outraged*). George, your mother is a hateful, depraved old woman.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mary!

LADY MARY (*turning away*). Laugh in-

deed, when it will always be such a pain to me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*with strange humility*). If only you would let me bear all the pain, Mary.

LADY MARY (*who is taken aback*). George, I think you are the noblest man——

(*She is touched, and gives him both her hands. Unfortunately he simpers.*)

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She was a pretty little thing.

(*She stares, but he marches to his doom.*) Ah, not beautiful like you. I assure you it was the merest flirtation; there were a few letters, but we have got them back. It was all owing to the boat being so late at Calais. You see she had such large, helpless eyes.

LADY MARY (*fixing him*). George, when you lunched with father to-day at the club——

LORD BROCKLEHURST. I didn't. He wired me that he couldn't come.

LADY MARY (*with a tremor*). But he wrote you?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. No.

LADY MARY (*a bird singing in her breast*). You haven't seen him since?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. No.

(*She is saved. Is he to be let off also? Not at all. She bears down on him like a ship of war.*)

LADY MARY. George, who and what is this woman?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*cowering*). She was—she is—the shame of it—a lady's-maid.

LADY MARY (*properly horrified*). A what?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. A lady's-maid. A mere servant, Mary. (LADY MARY *whirls round so that he shall not see her face.*) I first met her at this house when you were entertaining the servants; so you see it was largely your father's fault.

LADY MARY (*looking him up and down*). A lady's-maid?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*degraded*). Her name was Fisher.

LADY MARY. My maid!

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*with open hands*). Can you forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY. Oh George, George!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother urged me not to tell you anything about it; but——

LADY MARY (*from her heart*). I am so glad you told me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You see there was nothing wrong in it.

LADY MARY (*thinking perhaps of another incident*). No, indeed.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*inclined to simper again*). And she behaved awfully well. She quite saw that it was because the boat was late. I suppose the glamour to a girl in service of a man in high position——

LADY MARY. Glamour!—yes, yes, that was it.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother says that a girl in such circumstances is to be excused if she loses her head.

LADY MARY (*impulsively*). George, I am so sorry if I said anything against your mother. I am sure she is the dearest old thing.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*in calm waters at last*). Of course for women of our class she has a very different standard.

LADY MARY (*grown tiny*). Of course.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You see, knowing how good a woman she is herself, she was naturally anxious that I should marry some one like her. That is what has made her watch your conduct so jealously, Mary.

LADY MARY (*hurriedly thinking things out*). I know. I—I think, George, that before your mother comes I should like to say a word to father.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*nervously*). About this?

LADY MARY. Oh no; I shan't tell him of this. About something else.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. And you do forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY (*smiling on him*). Yes, yes. I—I am sure the boat was *very* late, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*earnestly*). It really was.

LADY MARY. I am even relieved to know that you are not quite perfect, dear. (*She rests her hands on his shoulders. She has a moment of contrition.*) George, when we are married, we

shall try to be not an entirely frivolous couple, won't we? We must endeavour to be of some little use, dear.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*the ass*). *Noblesse oblige.*

LADY MARY (*haunted by the phrases of a betier man*). Mary Lasenby is determined to play the game, George.

(*Perhaps she adds to herself, 'Except just this once.' A kiss closes this episode of the two lovers; and soon after the departure of* LADY MARY *the* COUNTESS OF BROCKLEHURST *is announced. She is a very formidable old lady.*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Alone, George?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother, I told her all; she has behaved magnificently.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*who has not shared his fears*). Silly boy. (*She casts a supercilious eye on the island trophies.*) So these are the wonders they brought back with them. Gone away to dry her eyes, I suppose?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*proud of his mate*). She didn't cry, mother.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. No? (*She reflects.*) You 're quite right. I wouldn't have cried. Cold, icy. Yes, that was it.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*who has not often contradicted her*). I assure you, mother, that wasn't it at all. She forgave me at once.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*opening her eyes sharply to the full*). Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She was awfully nice about the boat being late; she even said she was relieved to find that I wasn't quite perfect.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*pouncing*). She said that?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She really did.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I mean *I* wouldn't. Now if *I* had said that, what would have made me say it? (*Suspiciously.*) George, is Mary all we think her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*with unexpected spirit*). If she wasn't, mother, you would know it.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Hold your tongue, boy. We don't really know what happened on that island.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You were reading the book all the morning.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How can I be sure that the book is true?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. They all talk of it as true.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How do I know that they are not lying?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Why should they lie?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Why shouldn't they? (*She reflects again.*) If I had been wrecked on an island, I think it highly probable that I should have lied when I came back. Weren't some servants with them?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Crichton, the butler.

(*He is surprised to see her ring the bell.*) Why, mother, you are not going to——

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Yes, I am. (*Pointedly.*) George, watch whether Crichton begins any of his answers to my questions with 'The fact is.'

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Why?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Because that is usually the beginning of a lie.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*as* CRICHTON *opens the door*). Mother, you can't do these things in other people's houses.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*coolly, to* CRICHTON). It was I who rang. (*Surveying him through her eyeglass.*) So you were one of the castaways, Crichton?

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Delightful book Mr. Woolley has written about your adventures. (CRICHTON *bows.*) Don't you think so?

CRICHTON. I have not read it, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Odd that they should not have presented you with a copy.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Presumably Crichton is no reader.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. By the way, Crichton, were there any books on the island?

CRICHTON. I had one, my lady—Henley's poems.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Never heard of him.

(CRICHTON *again bows.*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*who has not heard of him either*). I think you were not the only servant wrecked?

CRICHTON. There was a young woman, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I want to see her. (CRICHTON *bows, but remains.*) Fetch her up.

(*He goes.*)

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*almost standing up to his mother*). This is scandalous.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*defining her position*). I am a mother.

(CATHERINE *and* AGATHA *enter in dazzling confections, and quake in secret to find themselves practically alone with* LADY BROCKLEHURST.)

(*Even as she greets them.*) How d' you do, Catherine—Agatha? You didn't dress like this on the island, I expect! By the way, how did you dress?

(*They have thought themselves prepared, but——*)

AGATHA. Not—not so well, of course, but quite the same idea.

(*They are relieved by the arrival of* TREHERNE, *who is in clerical dress.*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How do you do, Mr. Treherne? There is not so much of you in the book as I had hoped.

TREHERNE (*modestly*). There wasn't very much of me on the island, Lady Brocklehurst.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How d' ye mean?

(*He shrugs his honest shoulders.*)

LORD BROCKLEHURST. I hear you have got a living, Treherne. Congratulations.

TREHERNE. Thanks.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Is it a good one?

TREHERNE. So-so. They are rather weak in bowling, but it 's a good bit of turf.

(*Confidence is restored by the entrance of* ERNEST, *who takes in the situation promptly, and, of course, knows he is a match for any old lady.*)

ERNEST (*with ease*). How do you do, Lady Brocklehurst.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Our brilliant author!

ERNEST (*impervious to satire*). Oh, I don't know.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. It is as engrossing, Mr. Woolley, as if it were a work of fiction.

ERNEST (*suddenly uncomfortable*). Thanks, awfully. (*Recovering.*) The fact is——

(*He is puzzled by seeing the Brocklehurst family exchange meaning looks.*)

CATHERINE (*to the rescue*). Lady Brocklehurst, Mr. Treherne and I—we are engaged.

AGATHA. And Ernest and I.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*grimly*). I see, my dears; thought it wise to keep the island in the family.

(*An awkward moment this for the entrance of* LORD LOAM *and* LADY MARY, *who, after a private talk upstairs, are feeling happy and secure.*)

LORD LOAM (*with two hands for his distinguished guest*). Aha! ha, ha! younger than any of them, Emily.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Flatterer. (*To* LADY MARY.) You seem in high spirits, Mary.

LADY MARY (*gaily*). I am.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*with a significant glance at* LORD BROCKLEHURST). After——

LADY MARY. I—I mean. The fact is——

(*Again that disconcerting glance between the Countess and her son.*)

LORD LOAM (*humorously*). She hears wedding bells, Emily, ha, ha!

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*coldly*). Do you,

Mary? Can't say I do; but I 'm hard of hearing.

LADY MARY (*instantly her match*). If you don't, Lady Brocklehurst, I 'm sure I don't.

LORD LOAM (*nervously*). Tut, tut. Seen our curios from the island, Emily; I should like you to examine them.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Thank you, Henry. I am glad you say that, for I have just taken the liberty of asking two of them to step upstairs.

(*There is an uncomfortable silence, which the entrance of* CRICHTON *with* TWEENY *does not seem to dissipate.* CRICHTON *is impenetrable, but* TWEENY *hangs back in fear.*)

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*stoutly*). Loam, I have no hand in this.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*undisturbed*). Pooh, what have I done? You always begged me to speak to the servants, Henry, and I merely wanted to discover whether the views you used to hold about equality were adopted on the island; it seemed a splendid opportunity, but Mr. Woolley has not a word on the subject.

(*All eyes turn to* ERNEST.)

ERNEST (*with confidence*). The fact is——

(*The fatal words again.*)

LORD LOAM (*not quite certain what he is to assure her of*). I assure you, Emily——

LADY MARY (*as cold as steel*). Father, nothing whatever happened on the island of which I, for one, am ashamed, and I hope Crichton will be allowed to answer Lady Brocklehurst's questions.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. To be sure. There 's nothing to make a fuss about, and we 're a family party. (*To* CRICHTON.) Now, truthfully, my man.

CRICHTON (*calmly*). I promise that, my lady.

(*Some hearts sink, the hearts that could never understand a Crichton.*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*sharply*). Well, were you all equal on the island?

CRICHTON. No, my lady. I think I may say there was as little equality there as elsewhere.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. All the social distinctions were preserved?

CRICHTON. As at home, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. The servants?

CRICHTON. They had to keep their place.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Wonderful. How was it managed? (*With an inspiration.*) You, girl, tell me that?

(*Can there be a more critical moment?*)

TWEENY (*in agony*). If you please, my lady, it was all the Gov.'s doing.

(*They give themselves up for lost.* LORD LOAM *tries to sink out of sight.*)

CRICHTON. In the regrettable slang of the servants' hall, my lady, the master is usually referred to as the Gov.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I see. (*She turns to* LORD LOAM.) You——

LORD LOAM (*reappearing*). Yes, I understand that is what they call me.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*to* CRICHTON). You didn't even take your meals with the family?

CRICHTON. No, my lady, I dined apart.

(*Is all safe?*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*alas*). You, girl, also? Did you dine with Crichton?

TWEENY (*scared*). No, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*fastening on her*). With whom?

TWEENY. I took my bit of supper with—with Daddy and Polly and the rest.

(*Væ victis.*)

ERNEST (*leaping into the breach*). Dear old Daddy—he was our monkey. You remember our monkey, Agatha?

AGATHA. Rather! What a funny old darling he was.

CATHERINE (*thus encouraged*). And don't you think Polly was the sweetest little parrot, Mary?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Ah! I understand; animals you had domesticated?

LORD LOAM (*heavily*). Quite so—quite so.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. The servants' teas that used to take place here once a month——

CRICHTON. They did not seem natural on the island, my lady, and were discontinued by the Gov.'s orders.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. A clear proof, Loam, that they were a mistake here.

LORD LOAM (*seeing the opportunity for a*

diversion). I admit it frankly. I abandon them. Emily, as the result of our experiences on the island, I think of going over to the Tories.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I am delighted to hear it.

LORD LOAM (*expanding*). Thank you, Crichton, thank you; that is all.

(*He motions to them to go, but the time is not yet.*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST. One moment. (*There is a universal but stifled groan.*) Young people, Crichton, will be young people, even on an island; now, I suppose there was a certain amount of—shall we say sentimentalising, going on?

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady, there was.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (*ashamed*). Mother!

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*disregarding him*). Which gentleman? (*To* TWEENY) You, girl, tell me.

TWEENY (*confused*). If you please, my lady——

ERNEST (*hurriedly*). The fact is——

(*He is checked as before, and probably says 'D—n' to himself, but he has saved the situation.*)

TWEENY (*gasping*). It was him—Mr. Ernest, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*counsel for the prosecution*). With which lady?

AGATHA. I have already told you, Lady Brocklehurst, that Ernest and I——

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Yes, *now;* but you were two years on the island. (*Looking at* LADY MARY). Was it this lady?

TWEENY. No, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Then I don't care which of the others it was. (TWEENY *gurgles.*) Well, I suppose that will do.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Do! I hope you are ashamed of yourself, mother. (*To* CRICHTON, *who is going*). You are an excellent fellow, Crichton; and if, after we are married, you ever wish to change your place, come to us.

LADY MARY (*losing her head for the only time*). Oh no, impossible.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*at once suspicious*). Why impossible? (LADY MARY *cannot answer, or perhaps she is too proud.*) Do you see why it should be impossible, my man?

(*He can make or mar his unworthy* MARY *now. Have you any doubt of him?*)

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady. I had not told you, my lord, but as soon as your lordship is suited I wish to leave service.

(*They are all immensely relieved, except poor* TWEENY.)

TREHERNE (*the only curious one*). What will you do, Crichton?

(CRICHTON *shrugs his shoulders; 'God knows,' it may mean.*)

CRICHTON. Shall I withdraw, my lord?

(*He withdraws without a tremor,* TWEENY *accompanying him. They can all breathe again; the thunderstorm is over.*)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (*thankful to have made herself unpleasant*). Horrid of me, wasn't it? But if one wasn't disagreeable now and again, it would be horribly tedious to be an old woman. He will soon be yours, Mary, and

then—think of the opportunities you will have of being disagreeable to me. On that understanding, my dear, don't you think we might——?

(*Their cold lips meet.*)

LORD LOAM (*vaguely*). Quite so—quite so.

(CRICHTON *announces dinner, and they file out.* LADY MARY *stays behind a moment and impulsively holds out her hand.*)

LADY MARY. To wish you every dear happiness.

CRICHTON (*an enigma to the last.*) The same to you, my lady.

LADY MARY. Do you despise me, Crichton? (*The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer.*) You are the best man among us.

CRICHTON. On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.

LADY MARY. Then there 's something wrong with England.

CRICHTON. My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England.

LADY MARY. Tell me one thing: you have not lost your courage?

CRICHTON. No, my lady.

(*She goes. He turns out the lights.*)

DEAR BRUTUS

ACT I

ACT I

The scene is a darkened room, which the curtain reveals so stealthily that if there was a mouse on the stage it is there still. Our object is to catch our two chief characters unawares; they are Darkness and Light.

The room is so obscure as to be invisible, but at the back of the obscurity are French windows, through which is seen Lob's garden bathed in moonshine. The Darkness and Light, which this room and garden represent, are very still, but we should feel that it is only the pause in which old enemies regard each other before they come to the grip. The moonshine stealing about among the flowers, to give them their last instructions, has left a smile upon them, but it is a smile with a menace in it for the dwellers in darkness. What we expect to see next is the moonshine slowly pushing the windows open, so that it may whisper to a confederate in the house, whose name is Lob. But though we may be sure that this was about to happen it does not happen; a stir among the dwellers in darkness prevents it.

These unsuspecting ones are in the dining-room, and as a communicating door opens we hear them at play. Several tenebrious shades appear in the lighted doorway and hesitate on the two steps that lead down into the unlit room. The fanciful among us may conceive a rustle at the same moment among the flowers. The engagement has begun, though not in the way we had intended.

VOICES.—

'*Go on, Coady: lead the way.*'

'*Oh dear, I don't see why I should go first.*'

'*The nicest always goes first.*'

'*It is a strange house if I am the nicest.*'

'*It is a strange house.*'

'*Don't close the door; I can't see where the switch is.*'

'*Over here.*'

They have been groping their way forward, blissfully unaware of how they shall be groping there again more terribly before the night is out. Some one finds a switch, and the room is illumined, with the effect that the garden seems to have drawn back a step as if worsted in the first encounter. But it is only waiting.

The apparently inoffensive chamber thus suddenly revealed is, for a bachelor's home, creditably like a

charming country house drawing-room and abounds in the little feminine touches that are so often best applied by the hand of man. There is nothing in the room inimical to the ladies, unless it be the cut flowers which are from the garden and possibly in collusion with it. The fireplace may also be a little dubious. It has been hacked out of a thick wall which may have been there when the other walls were not, and is presumably the cavern where Lob, when alone, sits chatting to himself among the blue smoke. He is as much at home by this fire as any gnome that may be hiding among its shadows; but he is less familiar with the rest of the room, and when he sees it, as for instance on his lonely way to bed, he often stares long and hard at it before chuckling uncomfortably.

There are five ladies, and one only of them is elderly, the Mrs. Coade whom a voice in the darkness has already proclaimed the nicest. She is the nicest, though the voice was no good judge. Coady, as she is familiarly called and as her husband also is called, each having for many years been able to answer for the other, is a rounded old lady with a beaming smile that has accompanied her from childhood. If she lives to be a hundred she will pretend to the census man that she is only ninety-nine. She has no other vice that has not been smoothed out of existence by her placid

life, and she has but one complaint against the male Coady, the rather odd one that he has long forgotten his first wife. Our Mrs. Coady never knew the first one, but it is she alone who sometimes looks at the portrait of her and preserves in their home certain mementoes of her, such as a lock of brown hair, which the equally gentle male Coady must have treasured once but has now forgotten. The first wife had been slightly lame, and in their brief married life he had carried solicitously a rest for her foot, had got so accustomed to doing this, that after a quarter of a century with our Mrs. Coady he still finds footstools for her as if she were lame also. She has ceased to pucker her face over this, taking it as a kind little thoughtless attention, and indeed with the years has developed a friendly limp.

Of the other four ladies, all young and physically fair, two are married. Mrs. Dearth is tall, of smouldering eye and fierce desires, murky beasts lie in ambush in the labyrinths of her mind, she is a white-faced gypsy with a husky voice, most beautiful when she is sullen, and therefore frequently at her best. The other ladies when in conclave refer to her as The Dearth. Mrs. Purdie is a safer companion for the toddling kind of man. She is soft and pleading, and would seek what she wants by laying her head on the loved one's

shoulder, while The Dearth might attain it with a pistol. A brighter spirit than either is Joanna Trout who, when her affections are not engaged, has a merry face and figure, but can dismiss them both at the important moment, which is at the word 'love.' Then Joanna quivers, her sense of humour ceases to beat and the dullest man may go ahead. There remains Lady Caroline Laney of the disdainful poise, lately from the enormously select school where they are taught to pronounce their r*'s as* w*'s; nothing else seems to be taught, but for matrimonial success nothing else is necessary. Every woman who pronounces* r *as* w *will find a mate; it appeals to all that is chivalrous in man.*

An old-fashioned gallantry induces us to accept from each of these ladies her own estimate of herself, and fortunately it is favourable in every case. This refers to their estimate of themselves up to the hour of ten on the evening on which we first meet them; the estimate may have changed temporarily by the time we part from them on the following morning. What their mirrors say to each of them is, A dear face, not classically perfect but abounding in that changing charm which is the best type of English womanhood; here is a woman who has seen and felt far more than her reticent nature readily betrays; she sometimes smiles, but behind that concession, controlling it in a manner

hardly less than adorable, lurks the sigh called Knowledge; a strangely interesting face, mysterious; a line for her tombstone might be 'If I had been a man what adventures I could have had with her who lies here.'

Are these ladies then so very alike? They would all deny it, so we must take our own soundings. At this moment of their appearance in the drawing-room at least they are alike in having a common interest. No sooner has the dining-room door closed than purpose leaps to their eyes; oddly enough, the men having been got rid of, the drama begins.

ALICE DEARTH (*the darkest spirit but the bravest*). We must not waste a second. Our minds are made up, I think?

JOANNA. Now is the time.

MRS. COADE (*at once delighted and appalled*). Yes, now if at all; but should we?

ALICE. Certainly; and before the men come in.

MABEL PURDIE. You don't think we should wait for the men? They are as much in it as we are.

LADY CAROLINE (*unlucky, as her opening remark is without a single* r). Lob would be with them. If the thing is to be done at all it should be done now.

MRS. COADE. Is it quite fair to Lob? After all, he is our host.

JOANNA. Of course it isn't fair to him, but let 's do it, Coady.

MRS. COADE. Yes, let 's do it!

MABEL. Mrs. Dearth *is* doing it.

ALICE (*who is writing out a telegram*). Of course I am. The men are not coming, are they?

JOANNA (*reconnoitring*). No; your husband is having another glass of port.

ALICE. I am sure he is. One of you ring, please.

(*The bold* JOANNA *rings.*)

MRS. COADE. Poor Matey!

LADY CAROLINE. He wichly desewves what he is about to get.

JOANNA. He is coming! Don't all stand huddled together like conspirators.

MRS. COADE. It is what we are!

(*Swiftly they find seats, and are sunk thereon like ladies waiting languidly for their lords, when the doomed butler appears. He is a man of brawn, who would cast any one of them forth for a wager; but we are about to connive at the triumph of mind over matter.*)

ALICE (*always at her best before "the bright face of danger"*). Ah, Matey, I wish this telegram sent.

MATEY (*a general favourite*). Very good, ma'am. The village post office closed at eight, but if your message is important——

ALICE. It is; and you are so clever, Matey, I am sure that you can persuade them to oblige you.

MATEY (*taking the telegram*). I will see to it myself, ma'am; you can depend on its going.

(*There comes a little gasp from* COADY, *which is the equivalent to dropping a stitch in needle-work.*)

ALICE (*who is* THE DEARTH *now*). Thank you. Better read the telegram, Matey, to be sure that you can make it out. (MATEY *reads it to himself, and he has never quite the same faith in woman*

again. THE DEARTH *continues in a purring voice.*) Read it aloud, Matey.

MATEY. Oh, ma'am!

ALICE (*without the purr*). Aloud.

(*Thus encouraged, he reads the fatal missive.*)

MATEY. 'To Police Station, Great Cumney. Send officer first thing to-morrow morning to arrest Matey, butler, for theft of rings.'

ALICE. Yes, that is quite right.

MATEY. Ma'am! (*But seeing that she has taken up a book, he turns to* LADY CAROLINE.) My lady!

LADY CAROLINE (*whose voice strikes colder than* THE DEARTH'S). Should we not say how many wings?

ALICE. Yes, put in the number of rings, Matey.

(MATEY *does not put in the number, but he produces three rings from unostentatious parts of his person and returns them without noticeable dignity to their various owners.*)

MATEY (*hopeful that the incident is now closed*). May I tear up the telegram, ma'am?

ALICE. Certainly not.

LADY CAROLINE. I always said that this man was the culpwit. I am nevaw mistaken in faces, and I see bwoad awwows all over youws, Matey.

(*He might reply that he sees* w's *all over hers, but it is no moment for repartee.*)

MATEY. It is deeply regretted.

ALICE (*darkly*). I am sure it is.

JOANNA (*who has seldom remained silent for so long*). We may as well tell him now that it is not our rings we are worrying about. They have just been a means to an end, Matey.

(*The stir among the ladies shows that they have arrived at the more interesting point.*)

ALICE. Precisely. In other words that telegram is sent unless——

(MATEY'S *head rises.*)

JOANNA. Unless you can tell us instantly what peculiarity it is that all we ladies have in common.

MABEL. Not only the ladies; all the guests in this house.

ALICE. We have been here a week, and we

find that when Lob invited us he knew us all so little that we begin to wonder why he asked us. And now from words he has let drop we know that we were invited because of something he thinks we have in common.

MABEL. But he won't say what it is.

LADY CAROLINE (*drawing back a little from* JOANNA). One knows that no people could be more unlike.

JOANNA (*thankfully*). One does.

MRS. COADE. And we can't sleep at night, Matey, for wondering what this something is.

JOANNA (*summing up*). But we are sure you know, and if you don't tell us—quod.

MATEY (*with growing uneasiness*). I don't know what you mean, ladies.

ALICE. Oh yes, you do.

MRS. COADE. You must admit that your master is a very strange person.

MATEY (*wriggling*). He is a little odd, ma'am. That is why every one calls him Lob; not Mr. Lob.

JOANNA. He is so odd that it has got on my nerves that we have been invited here for some

sort of horrid experiment. (MATEY *shivers.*) You look as if you thought so too!

MATEY. Oh no, miss, I—he—(*The words he would keep back elude him*). You shouldn't have come, ladies; you didn't ought to have come.

(*For the moment he is sorrier for them than for himself.*)

LADY CAROLINE. Shouldn't have come! Now, my man, what do you mean by that?

MATEY. Nothing, my lady: I—I just mean, why did you come if you are the kind he thinks?

MABEL. The kind he thinks?

ALICE. What kind does he think? Now we are getting at it.

MATEY (*guardedly*). I haven't a notion, ma'am.

LADY CAROLINE (*whose* w's *must henceforth be supplied by the judicious reader*). Then it is not necessarily our virtue that makes Lob interested in us?

MATEY (*thoughtlessly*). No, my lady; oh no, my lady. (*This makes an unfavourable impression.*)

MRS. COADE. And yet, you know, he is rather lovable.

MATEY (*carried away*). He is, ma'am. He is the most lovable old devil—I beg pardon, ma'am.

JOANNA. You scarcely need to, for in a way it is true. I have seen him out there among his flowers, petting them, talking to them, coaxing them till they simply *had* to grow.

ALICE (*making use perhaps of the wrong adjective*). It is certainly a divine garden.

(*They all look at the unblinking enemy.*)

MRS. COADE (*not more deceived than the others*). How lovely it is in the moonlight! Roses, roses, all the way. (*Dreamily.*) It is like a hat I once had when I was young.

ALICE. Lob is such an amazing gardener that I believe he could even grow hats.

LADY CAROLINE (*who will catch it for this*). He is a wonderful gardener; but is that quite nice at his age? What *is* his age, man?

MATEY (*shuffling*). He won't tell, my lady. I think he is frightened that the police would step in if they knew how old he is. They do say in the village that they remember him seventy years ago, looking just as he does to-day.

ALICE. Absurd.

MATEY. Yes, ma'am; but there are his razors.

LADY CAROLINE. Razors?

MATEY. *You* won't know about razors, my lady, not being married—as yet—excuse me. But a married lady can tell a man's age by the number of his razors. (*A little scared.*) If you saw his razors—there is a little world of them, from patents of the present day back to implements so horrible, you can picture him with them in his hand scraping his way through the ages.

LADY CAROLINE. You amuse one to an extent. Was he ever married?

MATEY (*too lightly*). He has quite forgotten, my lady. (*Reflecting.*) How long ago is it since Merry England?

LADY CAROLINE. Why do you ask?

MABEL. In Queen Elizabeth's time, wasn't it?

MATEY. He says he is all that is left of Merry England: that little man.

MABEL (*who has brothers*). Lob? I think there is a famous cricketer called Lob.

MRS. COADE. Wasn't there a Lob in Shakespeare? No, of course I am thinking of Robin Goodfellow.

LADY CAROLINE. The names are so alike.

JOANNA. Robin Goodfellow was Puck.

MRS. COADE (*with natural elation*). That is what was in my head. Lob was another name for Puck.

JOANNA. Well, he is certainly rather like what Puck might have grown into if he had forgotten to die. And, by the way, I remember now he does call his flowers by the old Elizabethan names.

MATEY. He always calls the Nightingale Philomel, miss—if that is any help.

ALICE (*who is not omniscient*). None whatever. Tell me this, did he specially ask you all for Midsummer week?

(*They assent.*)

MATEY (*who might more judiciously have remained silent*). He would!

MRS. COADE. Now what do you mean?

MATEY. He always likes them to be here on Midsummer night, ma'am.

ALICE. Them? Whom?

MATEY. Them who have that in common.

MABEL. What can it be?

MATEY. I don't know.

LADY CAROLINE (*suddenly introspective*). I hope we are all nice women? We don't know each other very well. (*Certain suspicions are reborn in various breasts.*) Does anything startling happen at those times?

MATEY. I don't know.

JOANNA. Why, I believe this is Midsummer Eve!

MATEY. Yes, miss, it is. The villagers know it. They are all inside their houses, to-night—with the doors barred.

LADY CAROLINE. Because of—of him?

MATEY. He frightens them. There are stories.

ALICE. What alarms them? Tell us—or—(*She brandishes the telegram.*)

MATEY. I know nothing for certain, ma'am. I have never done it myself. He has wanted me to, but I wouldn't.

MABEL. Done what?

MATEY (*with fine appeal*). Oh, ma'am, don't ask me. Be merciful to me, ma'am. I am not

bad naturally. It was just going into domestic service that did for me; the accident of being flung among bad companions. It 's touch and go how the poor turn out in this world; all depends on your taking the right or the wrong turning.

MRS. COADE (*the lenient*). I daresay that is true.

MATEY (*under this touch of sun*). When I was young, ma'am, I was offered a clerkship in the city. If I had taken it there wouldn't be a more honest man alive to-day. I would give the world to be able to begin over again.

(*He means every word of it, though the flowers would here, if they dared, burst into ironical applause.*)

MRS. COADE. It is very sad, Mrs. Dearth.

ALICE. I am sorry for him; but still——

MATEY (*his eyes turning to* LADY CAROLINE). What do you say, my lady?

LADY CAROLINE (*briefly*). As you ask me, I should certainly say jail.

MATEY (*desperately*). If you will say no more about this, ma'am—I'll give you a tip that is worth it.

ALICE. Ah, now you are talking.

LADY CAROLINE. Don't listen to him.

MATEY (*lowering*). You are the one that is hardest on me.

LADY CAROLINE. Yes, I flatter myself I am.

MATEY (*forgetting himself*). You might take a wrong turning yourself, my lady.

LADY CAROLINE. I? How dare you, man?

(*But the flowers rather like him for this: it is possibly what gave them a certain idea.*)

JOANNA (*near the keyhole of the dining-room door*). The men are rising.

ALICE (*hurriedly*). Very well, Matey, we agree —if the 'tip' is good enough.

LADY CAROLINE. You will regret this.

MATEY. I think not, my lady. It 's this: I wouldn't go out to-night if he asks you. Go into the garden, if you like. The garden is all right. (*He really believes this.*) I wouldn't go farther —not to-night.

MRS. COADE. But he never proposes to us to go farther. Why should he to-night?

MATEY. I don't know, ma'am, but don't any of you go—(*devilishly*) except you, my lady; I should like you to go.

LADY CAROLINE. Fellow!

(*They consider this odd warning.*)

ALICE. Shall I? (*They nod and she tears up the telegram.*)

MATEY (*with a gulp*). Thank you, ma'am.

LADY CAROLINE. You should have sent that telegram off.

JOANNA. You are sure you have told us all you know, Matey?

MATEY. Yes, miss. (*But at the door he is more generous.*) Above all, ladies, I wouldn't go into the wood.

MABEL. The wood? Why, there is no wood within a dozen miles of here.

MATEY. No, ma'am. But all the same I wouldn't go into it, ladies—not if I was you.

(*With this cryptic warning he leaves them, and any discussion of it is prevented by the arrival of their host.* LOB *is very small, and probably no one has ever looked so old except some newborn child. To such as watch him narrowly, as the ladies now do for the first time, he has the effect of seeming to be hollow, an attenuated piece of piping in-*

sufficiently inflated; one feels that if he were to strike against a solid object he might rebound feebly from it, which would be less disconcerting if he did not obviously know this and carefully avoid the furniture; he is so light that the subject must not be mentioned in his presence, but it is possible that, were the ladies to combine, they could blow him out of a chair. He enters portentously, his hands behind his back, as if every bit of him, from his domed head to his little feet, were the physical expressions of the deep thoughts within him, then suddenly he whirls round to make his guests jump. This amuses him vastly, and he regains his gravity with difficulty. He addresses MRS. COADE.)

LOB. Standing, dear lady? Pray be seated.

(*He finds a chair for her and pulls it away as she is about to sit, or kindly pretends to be about to do so, for he has had this quaint conceit every evening since she arrived.*)

MRS. COADE (*who loves children*). You naughty!

LOB (*eagerly*). It is quite a flirtation, isn't it?

(*He rolls on a chair, kicking out his legs in an ecstasy of satisfaction. But the ladies are not certain that he is the little innocent they have hitherto thought him. The advent of* MR. COADE *and* MR. PURDIE *presently adds to their misgivings.* MR. COADE *is old, a sweet pippin of a man with a gentle smile for all; he must have suffered much, you conclude incorrectly, to acquire that tolerant smile. Sometimes, as when he sees other people at work, a wistful look takes the place of the smile, and* MR. COADE *fidgets like one who would be elsewhere. Then there rises before his eyes the room called the study in his house, whose walls are lined with boxes marked A. B. C. to Z. and* A^2. B^2. C^2. *to* K^2. *These contain dusty notes for his great work on the Feudal System, the notes many years old, the work, strictly speaking, not yet begun. He still speaks at times of finishing it but never of beginning it. He knows that in more favourable circumstances, for instance if he had been a poor man instead of pleasantly well to do, he*

could have flung himself avidly into that noble undertaking; but he does not allow his secret sorrow to embitter him or darken the house. Quickly the vision passes, and he is again his bright self. Idleness, he says in his game way, has its recompenses. It is charming now to see how he at once crosses to his wife, solicitous for her comfort. He is bearing down on her with a footstool when MR. PURDIE *comes from the dining-room. He is the most brilliant of our company, recently notable in debate at Oxford, where he was runner-up for the presidentship of the Union and only lost it because the other man was less brilliant. Since then he has gone to the bar on Monday, married on Tuesday and had a brief on Wednesday. Beneath his brilliance, and making charming company for himself, he is aware of intellectual powers beyond his years. As we are about to see, he has made one mistake in his life which he is bravely facing.*)

ALICE. Is my husband still sampling the port, Mr. Purdie?

PURDIE (*with a disarming smile for the absent* DEARTH). Do you know, I believe he is. Do the ladies like our proposal, Coade?

COADE. I have not told them of it yet. The fact is, I am afraid that it might tire my wife too much. Do you feel equal to a little exertion to-night, Coady, or is your foot troubling you?

MRS. COADE (*the kind creature*). I have been resting it, Coady.

COADE (*propping it on the footstool*). There! Is that more comfortable? Presently, dear, if you are agreeable we are all going out for a walk.

MRS. COADE (*quoting* MATEY). The garden is all right.

PURDIE (*with jocular solemnity*). Ah, but it is not to be the garden. We are going farther afield. We have an adventure for to-night. Get thick shoes and a wrap, Mrs. Dearth; all of you.

LADY CAROLINE (*with but languid interest*). Where do you propose to take us?

PURDIE. To find a mysterious wood.

(*With the word 'wood' the ladies are blown upright. Their eyes turn to* LOB, *who,*

however, has never looked more innocent.)

JOANNA. Are you being funny, Mr. Purdie? You know quite well that there are not any trees for miles around. You have said yourself that it is the one blot on the landscape.

COADE (*almost as great a humorist as* PURDIE). Ah, on ordinary occasions! But allow us to point out to you, Miss Joanna, that this is Midsummer Eve.

(LOB *again comes sharply under female observation.*)

PURDIE. Tell them what you told us, Lob.

LOB (*with a pout for the credulous*). It is all nonsense, of course; just foolish talk of the villagers. They say that on Midsummer Eve there is a strange wood in this part of the country.

ALICE (*lowering*). Where?

PURDIE. Ah, that is one of its most charming features. It is never twice in the same place apparently. It has been seen on different parts of the Downs and on More Common; once it was close to Radley village and another time about a mile from the sea. Oh, a sporting wood!

LADY CAROLINE. And Lob is anxious that we should all go and look for it?

COADE. Not he; Lob is the only sceptic in the house. Says it is all rubbish, and that we shall be sillies if we go. But we believe, eh, Purdie?

PURDIE (*waggishly*). Rather!

LOB (*the artful*). Just wasting the evening. Let us have a round game at cards here instead.

PURDIE (*grandly*). No, sir, I am going to find that wood.

JOANNA. What is the good of it when it is found?

PURDIE. We shall wander in it deliciously, listening to a new sort of bird called the Philomel.

(LOB *is behaving in the most exemplary manner: making sweet little clucking sounds.*)

JOANNA (*doubtfully*). Shall we keep together, Mr. Purdie?

PURDIE. No, we must hunt in pairs.

JOANNA (*converted*). I think it would be rather fun. Come on, Coady, I 'll lace your boots for

you. I am sure your poor foot will carry you nicely.

ALICE. Miss Trout, wait a moment. Lob, has this wonderful wood any special properties?

LOB. Pooh! There 's no wood.

LADY CAROLINE. You 've never seen it?

LOB. Not I. I don't believe in it.

ALICE. Have any of the villagers ever been in it?

LOB (*dreamily*). So it 's said; so it 's said.

ALICE. What did they say were their experiences?

LOB. That isn't known. They never came back.

JOANNA (*promptly resuming her seat*). Never came back!

LOB. Absurd, of course. You see in the morning the wood was gone; and so they were gone, too. (*He clucks again.*)

JOANNA. I don't think I like this wood.

MRS. COADE. It certainly is Midsummer Eve.

COADE (*remembering that women are not yet civilised*). Of course if you ladies are against it we will drop the idea. It was only a bit of fun.

ALICE (*with a malicious eye on* LOB). Yes, better give it up—to please Lob.

PURDIE. Oh, all right, Lob. What about that round game of cards?

(*The proposal meets with approval.*)

LOB (*bursting into tears*). I wanted you to go. I had set my heart on your going. It is the thing I wanted, and it isn't good for me not to get the thing I want.

(*He creeps under the table and threatens the hands that would draw him out.*)

MRS. COADE. Good gracious, he has wanted it all the time. You wicked Lob!

ALICE. Now, you see there *is* something in it.

COADE. Nonsense, Mrs. Dearth, it was only a joke.

MABEL (*melting*). Don't cry, Lobby.

LOB. Nobody cares for me—nobody loves me. And I need to be loved.

(*Several of them are on their knees to him.*)

JOANNA. Yes, we do, we all love you. Nice, nice Lobby.

MABEL. Dear Lob, I am so fond of you.

JOANNA. Dry his eyes with my own hand-

kerchief. (*He holds up his eyes but is otherwise inconsolable.*)

LADY CAROLINE. Don't pamper him.

LOB (*furiously*). I need to be pampered.

MRS. COADE. You funny little man. Let us go at once and look for his wood.

(*All feel that thus alone can his tears be dried.*)

JOANNA. Boots and cloaks, hats forward. Come on, Lady Caroline, just to show you are not afraid of Matey.

(*There is a general exodus, and* LOB *left alone emerges from his temporary retirement. He clucks victoriously, but presently is on his knees again distressfully regarding some flowers that have fallen from their bowl.*)

LOB. Poor bruised one, it was I who hurt you. Lob is so sorry. Lie there! (*To another.*) Pretty, pretty, let me see where you have a pain? You fell on your head; is this the place? Now I make it better. Oh, little rascal, you are not hurt at all; you just pretend. Oh dear, oh dear! Sweetheart, don't cry, you are now

prettier than ever. You were too tall. Oh, how beautifully you smell now that you are small. (*He replaces the wounded tenderly in their bowl.*) Drink, drink. Now, you are happy again. The little rascal smiles. All smile, please—nod heads—aha! aha! You love Lob —Lob loves you.

(JOANNA *and* MR. PURDIE *stroll in by the window.*)

JOANNA. What were you saying to them, Lob?

LOB. I was saying 'Two 's company, three 's none.'

(*He departs with a final cluck.*)

JOANNA. That man—he suspects!

(*This is a very different* JOANNA *from the one who has so far flitted across our scene. It is also a different* PURDIE. *In company they seldom look at each other, though when the one does so the eyes of the other magnetically respond. We have seen them trivial, almost cynical, but now we are to greet them as they know they really are, the great strong-hearted man and his natural mate,*

in the grip of the master passion. For the moment LOB'S *words have unnerved* JOANNA *and it is* JOHN PURDIE'S *dear privilege to soothe her.*)

PURDIE. No one minds Lob. My dear, oh my dear.

JOANNA (*faltering*). Yes, but he saw you kiss my hand. Jack, if Mabel were to suspect!

PURDIE (*happily*). There is nothing for her to suspect.

JOANNA (*eagerly*). No, there isn't, is there? (*She is desirous ever to be without a flaw.*) Jack, I am not doing anything wrong, am I?

PURDIE. You!

(*With an adorable gesture she gives him one of her hands, and manlike he takes the other also.*)

JOANNA. Mabel is your wife, Jack. I should so hate myself if I did anything that was disloyal to her.

PURDIE (*pressing her hand to her eyes as if counting them, in the strange manner of lovers*). Those eyes could never be disloyal—my lady of the nut-brown eyes. (*He holds her from him,*

surveying her, and is scorched in the flame of her femininity.) Oh, the sveldtness of you. (*Almost with reproach.*) Joanna, why are you so sveldt!

(*For his sake she would be less sveldt if she could, but she can't. She admits her failure with eyes grown still larger, and he envelops her so that he may not see her. Thus men seek safety.*)

JOANNA (*while out of sight*). All I want is to help her and you.

PURDIE. I know—how well I know—my dear brave love.

JOANNA. I am very fond of Mabel, Jack. I should like to be the best friend she has in the world.

PURDIE. You are, dearest. No woman ever had a better friend.

JOANNA. And yet I don't think she really likes me. I wonder why?

PURDIE (*who is the bigger brained of the two*). It is just that Mabel doesn't understand. Nothing could make me say a word against my wife——

JOANNA (*sternly*). I wouldn't listen to you if you did.

PURDIE. I love you all the more, dear, for saying that. But Mabel is a cold nature and she doesn't understand.

JOANNA (*thinking never of herself but only of him*). She doesn't appreciate your finer qualities.

PURDIE (*ruminating*). That 's it. But of course I am difficult. I always was a strange, strange creature. I often think, Joanna, that I am rather like a flower that has never had the sun to shine on it nor the rain to water it.

JOANNA. You break my heart.

PURDIE (*with considerable enjoyment*). I suppose there is no more lonely man than I walking the earth to-day.

JOANNA (*beating her wings*). It is so mournful.

PURDIE. It is the thought of you that sustains me, elevates me. You shine high above me like a star.

JOANNA. No, no. I wish I was wonderful, but I am not.

PURDIE. You have made me a better man, Joanna.

JOANNA. I am so proud to think that.

PURDIE. You have made me kinder to Mabel.

JOANNA. I am sure you are always kind to her.

PURDIE. Yes, I hope so. But I think now of special little ways of giving her pleasure. That never-to-be-forgotten day when we first met, you and I!

JOANNA (*fluttering nearer to him*). That tragic, lovely day by the weir. Oh, Jack!

PURDIE. Do you know how in gratitude I spent the rest of that day?

JOANNA (*crooning*). Tell me.

PURDIE. I read to Mabel aloud for an hour. I did it out of kindness to her, because I had met you.

JOANNA. It was dear of you.

PURDIE. Do you remember that first time my arms—your waist—you are so fluid, Joanna. (*Passionately.*) Why are you so fluid?

JOANNA (*downcast*). I can't help it, Jack.

PURDIE. I gave her a ruby bracelet for that.

JOANNA. It is a gem. You have given that lucky woman many lovely things.

PURDIE. It is my invariable custom to go

straight off and buy Mabel something whenever you have been sympathetic to me. Those new earrings of hers—they are in memory of the first day you called me Jack. Her Paquin gown—the one with the beads—was because you let me kiss you.

JOANNA. I didn't exactly let you.

PURDIE. No, but you have such a dear way of giving in.

JOANNA. Jack, she hasn't worn that gown of late.

PURDIE. No, nor the jewels. I think she has some sort of idea now that when I give her anything nice it means that you have been nice to me. She has rather a suspicious nature, Mabel; she never used to have it, but it seems to be growing on her. I wonder why, I wonder why?

(*In this wonder which is shared by* JOANNA *their lips meet, and* MABEL, *who has been about to enter from the garden quietly retires.*)

JOANNA. Was that any one in the garden?

PURDIE (*returning from a quest*). There is no one there now.

JOANNA. I am sure I heard some one. If

it was Mabel! (*With a perspicacity that comes of knowledge of her sex.*) Jack, if she saw us she will think you were kissing me.

(*These fears are confirmed by the rather odd bearing of* MABEL, *who now joins their select party.*)

MABEL (*apologetically*). I am so sorry to interrupt you, Jack; but please wait a moment before you kiss her again. Excuse me, Joanna. (*She quietly draws the curtains, thus shutting out the garden and any possible onlooker.*) I did not want the others to see you; they might not understand how noble you are, Jack. You can go on now.

(*Having thus passed the time of day with them she withdraws by the door, leaving* JACK *bewildered and* JOANNA *knowing all about it.*)

JOANNA. How extraordinary! Of all the——! Oh, but how contemptible! (*She sweeps to the door and calls to* MABEL *by name.*)

MABEL (*returning with promptitude*). Did you call me, Joanna?

JOANNA (*guardedly*). I insist on an explana-

tion. (*With creditable hauteur.*) What were you doing in the garden, Mabel?

MABEL (*who has not been so quiet all day*). I was looking for something I have lost.

PURDIE (*hope springing eternal*). Anything important?

MABEL. I used to fancy it, Jack. It is my husband's love. You don't happen to have picked it up, Joanna? If so and you don't set great store by it I should like it back—the pieces, I mean.

(MR. PURDIE *is about to reply to this, when* JOANNA *rather wisely fills the breach.*)

JOANNA. Mabel, I—I will not be talked to in that way. To imply that I—that your husband—oh, shame!

PURDIE (*finely*). I must say, Mabel, that I am a little disappointed in you. I certainly understood that you had gone up-stairs to put on your boots.

MABEL. Poor old Jack. (*She muses.*) A woman like that!

JOANNA (*changing her comment in the moment of utterance*),—I forgive you Mabel, you will be sorry for this afterwards.

PURDIE (*warningly, but still reluctant to think less well of his wife*). Not a word against Joanna, Mabel. If you knew how nobly she has spoken of you.

JOANNA (*imprudently*). She does know. She has been listening.

(*There is a moment's danger of the scene degenerating into something mid-Victorian. Fortunately a chivalrous man is present to lift it to a higher plane.* JOHN PURDIE *is one to whom subterfuge of any kind is abhorrent; if he has not spoken out before it is because of his reluctance to give* MABEL *pain. He speaks out now, and seldom probably has he proved himself more worthy.*)

PURDIE. This is a man's business. I must be open with you now, Mabel: it is the manlier way. If you wish it I shall always be true to you in word and deed; it is your right. But I cannot pretend that Joanna is not the one woman in the world for me. If I had met her before you—it 's Kismet, I suppose. (*He swells.*)

JOANNA (*from a chair*). Too late, too late.

MABEL (*although the woman has seen him swell*).

I suppose you never knew what true love was till you met her, Jack?

PURDIE. You force me to say it. Joanna and I are as one person. We have not a thought at variance. We are one rather than two.

MABEL (*looking at* JOANNA). Yes, and that's the one! (*With the cheapest sarcasm.*) I am so sorry to have marred your lives.

PURDIE. If any blame there is, it is all mine; she is as spotless as the driven snow. The moment I mentioned love to her she told me to desist.

MABEL. Not she.

JOANNA. So you *were* listening! (*The obtuseness of* MABEL *is very strange to her.*) Mabel, don't you see how splendid he is!

MABEL. Not quite, Joanna.

(*She goes away. She is really a better woman than this, but never capable of scaling that higher plane to which he has, as it were, offered her a hand.*)

JOANNA. How lovely of you, Jack, to take it all upon yourself.

PURDIE (*simply*). It is the man's privilege.

JOANNA. Mabel has such a horrid way of seeming to put people in the wrong.

PURDIE. Have you noticed that? Poor Mabel, it is not an enviable quality.

JOANNA (*despondently*). I don't think I care to go out now. She has spoilt it all. She has taken the innocence out of it, Jack.

PURDIE (*a rock*). We must be brave and not mind her. Ah, Joanna, if we had met in time. If only I could begin again. To be battered for ever just because I once took the wrong turning, it isn't fair.

JOANNA (*emerging from his arms*). The wrong turning! Now, who was saying that a moment ago—about himself? Why, it was Matey.

(*A footstep is heard.*)

PURDIE (*for the first time losing patience with his wife*). Is that her coming back again? It 's too bad.

(*But the intruder is* MRS. DEARTH, *and he greets her with relief.*)

Ah, it is you, Mrs. Dearth.

ALICE. Yes, it is; but thank you for telling me, Mr. Purdie. I don't intrude, do I?

JOANNA (*descending to the lower plane, on which even goddesses snap*). Why should you?

PURDIE. Rather not. We were—hoping it would be you. We want to start on the walk. I can't think what has become of the others. We have been looking for them everywhere. (*He glances vaguely round the room, as if they might so far have escaped detection.*)

ALICE (*pleasantly*). Well, do go on looking; under that flower-pot would be a good place. It is my husband I am in search of.

PURDIE (*who likes her best when they are in different rooms*). Shall I rout him out for you?

ALICE. How too unutterably kind of you, Mr. Purdie. I hate to trouble you, but it would be the sort of service one never forgets.

PURDIE. You know, I believe you are chaffing me.

ALICE. No, no, I am incapable of that.

PURDIE. I won't be a moment.

ALICE. Miss Trout and I will await your return with ill-concealed impatience.

(*They await it across a table, the newcomer in a reverie and* JOANNA *watching her.*

Presently MRS. DEARTH *looks up, and we may notice that she has an attractive screw of the mouth which denotes humour.*)

Yes, I suppose you are right; I daresay I am.

JOANNA (*puzzled*). I didn't say anything.

ALICE. I thought I heard you say 'That hateful Dearth woman, coming butting in where she is not wanted.'

(JOANNA *draws up her sveldt figure, but a screw of one mouth often calls for a similar demonstration from another, and both ladies smile. They nearly become friends.*)

JOANNA. You certainly have good ears.

ALICE (*drawling*). Yes, they have always been rather admired.

JOANNA (*snapping*). By the painters for whom you sat when you were an artist's model?

ALICE (*measuring her*). So that has leaked out, has it!

JOANNA (*ashamed*). I shouldn't have said that.

ALICE (*their brief friendship over*). Do you think I care whether you know or not?

JOANNA (*making an effort to be good*). I 'm sure you don't. Still, it was cattish of me.

ALICE. It was.

JOANNA (*in flame*). I don't see it.

(MRS. DEARTH *laughs and forgets her, and with the entrance of a man from the dining room* JOANNA *drifts elsewhere. Not so much a man, this newcomer, as the relic of what has been a good one; it is the most he would ever claim for himself. Sometimes, brandy in hand, he has visions of the* WILL DEARTH *he used to be, clear of eye, sees him but a field away, singing at his easel or, fishing-rod in hand, leaping a stile. Our* WILL *stares after the fellow for quite a long time, so long that the two melt into the one who finishes* LOB'S *brandy. He is scarcely intoxicated as he appears before the lady of his choice, but he is shaky and has watery eyes.*

ALICE *has had a rather wild love for this man, or for that other one, and he for her, but somehow it has gone whistling down the wind. We may expect therefore to see them at their worst when in each other's company.*)

DEARTH (*who is not without a humorous outlook on his own degradation*). I am uncommonly flattered, Alice, to hear that you have sent for me. It quite takes me aback.

ALICE (*with cold distaste*). It isn't your company I want, Will.

DEARTH. You know, I felt that Purdie must have delivered your message wrongly.

ALICE. I want you to come with us on this mysterious walk and keep an eye on Lob.

DEARTH. On poor little Lob? Oh, surely not.

ALICE. I can't make the man out. I want you to tell me something; when he invited us here, do you think it was you or me he specially wanted?

DEARTH. Oh, you. He made no bones about it; said there was something about you that made him want uncommonly to have you down here.

ALICE. Will, try to remember this: did he ask us for any particular time?

DEARTH. Yes, he was particular about its being Midsummer week.

ALICE. Ah! I thought so. Did he say what it was about me that made him want to have me here in Midsummer week?

DEARTH. No, but I presumed it must be your fascination, Alice.

ALICE. Just so. Well, I want you to come out with us to-night to watch him.

DEARTH. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy, spy on my host! And such a harmless little chap, too. Excuse me, Alice. Besides I have an engagement.

ALICE. An engagement—with the port decanter, I presume.

DEARTH. A good guess, but wrong. The decanter is now but an empty shell. Still, how you know me! My engagement is with a quiet cigar in the garden.

ALICE. Your hand is so unsteady, you won't be able to light the match.

DEARTH. I shall just manage. (*He triumphantly proves the exact truth of his statement.*)

ALICE. A nice hand for an artist!

DEARTH. One would scarcely call me an artist now-a-days.

ALICE. Not so far as any work is concerned.

DEARTH. Not so far as having any more pretty dreams to paint is concerned. (*Grinning at himself.*) Wonder why I have become such a waster, Alice?

ALICE. I suppose it was always in you.

DEARTH (*with perhaps a glimpse of the fishing-rod*). I suppose so; and yet I was rather a good sort in the days when I went courting you.

ALICE. Yes, I thought so. Unlucky days for me, as it has turned out.

DEARTH (*heartily*). Yes, a bad job for you. (*Puzzling unsteadily over himself.*) I didn't know I was a wrong 'un at the time; thought quite well of myself, thought a vast deal more of you. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy, how I used to leap out of bed at 6 A.M. all agog to be at my easel; blood ran through my veins in those days. And now I 'm middle-aged and done for. Funny! Don't know how it has come about, nor what has made the music mute. (*Mildly curious.*) When did you begin to despise me, Alice?

ALICE. When I got to know you really, Will; a long time age.

DEARTH (*bleary of eye*). Yes, I think that is true. It was a long time ago, and before I had begun to despise myself. It wasn't till I knew you had no opinion of me that I began to go down hill. You will grant that, won't you; and that I did try for a bit to fight on? If you had cared for me I wouldn't have come to this, surely?

ALICE. Well, I found I didn't care for you, and I wasn't hypocrite enough to pretend I did. That 's blunt, but you used to admire my bluntness.

DEARTH. The bluntness of you, the adorable wildness of you, you untamed thing! There were never any shades in you; kiss or kill was your motto, Alice. I felt from the first moment I saw you that you would love me or knife me.

(*Memories of their shooting star flare in both of them for as long as a sheet of paper might take to burn.*)

ALICE. I didn't knife you.

DEARTH. No. I suppose that was where you made the mistake. It is hard on you, old lady. (*Becoming watery.*) I suppose it 's too late to try to patch things up?

ALICE. Let 's be honest; it is too late, Will.

DEARTH (*whose tears would smell of brandy*). Perhaps if we had had children—Pity!

ALICE. A blessing I should think, seeing what sort of a father they would have had.

DEARTH (*ever reasonable*). I daresay you 're right. Well, Alice, I know that somehow it 's my fault. I 'm sorry for you.

ALICE. I 'm sorry for myself. If I hadn't married you what a different woman I should be. What a fool I was.

DEARTH. Ah! Three things they say come not back to men nor women—the spoken word, the past life and the neglected opportunity. Wonder if we should make any more of them, Alice, if they did come back to us.

ALICE. You wouldn't.

DEARTH (*avoiding a hiccup*). I guess you 're right.

ALICE. But I——

DEARTH (*sincerely*). Yes, what a boon for you. But I hope it 's not Freddy Finch-Fallowe you would put in my place; I know he is following you about again. (*He is far from threat-*

ening her, he has too beery an opinion of himself for that.)

ALICE. He followed me about, as you put it, before I knew you. I don't know why I quarrelled with him.

DEARTH. Your heart told you that he was no good, Alice.

ALICE. My heart told me that you *were*. So it wasn't of much service to me, my heart!

DEARTH. The Honourable Freddy Finch-Fallowe is a rotter.

ALICE (*ever inflammable*). You are certainly an authority on the subject.

DEARTH (*with the sad smile of the disillusioned*). You have me there. After which brief, but pleasant, little connubial chat, he pursued his dishonoured way into the garden.

(*He is however prevented doing so for the moment by the return of the others. They are all still in their dinner clothes though wearing wraps. They crowd in through the door, chattering.*)

LOB. Here they are! Are you ready, dear lady?

MRS. COADE *(seeing that* DEARTH'S *hand is on the window curtains)*. Are you not coming with us to find the wood, Mr. Dearth.

DEARTH. Alas, I am unavoidably detained. You will find me in the garden when you come back.

JOANNA *(whose sense of humour has been restored)*. If we ever do come back!

DEARTH. Precisely. *(With a groggy bow.)* Should we never meet again, Alice, fare thee well. Purdie, if you find the tree of knowledge in the wood bring me back an apple.

PURDIE. I promise.

LOB. Come quickly. Matey mustn't see me. *(He is turning out the lights.)*

LADY CAROLINE *(pouncing)*. Matey? What difference would that make, Lob?

LOB. He would take me off to bed; it 's past my time.

COADE *(not the least gay of the company)*. You know, old fellow, you make it very difficult for us to embark upon this adventure in the proper eerie spirit.

DEARTH. Well, I 'm for the garden.

(*He walks to the window, and the others are going out by the door. But they do not go. There is a hitch somewhere—at the window apparently, for* DEARTH *having begun to draw the curtains apart lets them fall, like one who has had a shock. The others remember long afterwards his grave face as he came quietly back and put his cigar on the table. The room is in darkness save for the light from one lamp.*)

PURDIE (*wondering*). How, now, Dearth?

DEARTH. What is it we get in that wood, Lob?

ALICE. Ah, he won't tell us that.

LOB (*shrinking*). Come on!

ALICE (*impressed by the change that has come over her husband*). Tell us first.

LOB (*forced to the disclosure*). They say that in the wood you get what nearly everybody here is longing for—a second chance.

(*The ladies are simultaneously enlightened.*)

JOANNA (*speaking for all*). So that is what we have in common!

COADE (*with gentle regret*). I have often thought, Coady, that if I had a second chance I should be a useful man instead of just a nice lazy one.

ALICE (*morosely*). A second chance!

LOB. Come on.

PURDIE (*gaily*). Yes, to the wood—the wood!

DEARTH (*as they are going out by the door*). Stop, why not go this way?

(*He pulls the curtains apart, and there comes a sudden indrawing of breath from all, for no garden is there now. In its place is an endless wood of great trees; the nearest of them has come close to the window. It is a sombre wood, with splashes of moonshine and of blackness standing very still in it.*

The party in the drawing-room are very still also, there is scarcely a cry or a movement. It is perhaps strange that the most obviously frightened is LOB *who calls vainly for* MATEY. *The first articulate voice is* DEARTH'S.)

DEARTH (*very quietly*). Any one ready to risk it?

PURDIE (*after another silence*). Of course there is nothing in it—just——

DEARTH (*grimly*). Of course. Going out, Purdie?

(PURDIE *draws back.*)

MRS. DEARTH (*the only one who is undaunted*). A second chance! (*She is looking at her husband. They all look at him as if he had been a leader once.*)

DEARTH (*with his sweet mournful smile*). I shall be back in a moment—probably.

(*As he passes into the wood his hands rise, as if a hammer had tapped him on the forehead. He is soon lost to view.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*after a long pause*). He does not come back.

MRS. COADE. It 's horrible.

(*She steals off by the door to her room, calling to her husband to do likewise. He takes a step after her, and stops in the grip of the last two words that holds them all. The stillness continues. At last* MRS. PURDIE

goes out into the wood, her hands raised, and is swallowed up by it.)

PURDIE. Mabel!

ALICE (*sardonically*). You will have to go now, Mr. Purdie.

(*He looks at* JOANNA, *and they go out together, one tap of the hammer for each.*)

LOB. That 's enough. (*Warningly.*) Don't *you* go, Mrs. Dearth. *You 'll* catch it if you go.

ALICE. A second chance!

(*She goes out unflinching.*)

LADY CAROLINE. One would like to know.

(*She goes out.* MRS. COADE'S *voice is heard from the stair calling to her husband. He hesitates but follows* LADY CAROLINE. *To* LOB *now alone comes* MATEY *with a tray of coffee cups.*)

MATEY (*as he places his tray on the table*). It is past your bed-time, sir. Say good-night to the ladies, and come along.

LOB. Matey, look!

(MATEY *looks.*)

MATEY (*shrinking*). Great heavens, then it 's true!

LOB. Yes, but I—I wasn't sure.

(MATEY *approaches the window cautiously to peer out, and his master gives him a sudden push that propels him into the wood.* LOB'S *back is toward us as he stands alone staring out upon the unknown. He is terrified still; yet quivers of rapture are running up and down his little frame.*)

ACT II

ACT II

We are translated to the depths of the wood in the enchantment of a moonlight night. In some other glade a nightingale is singing; in this one, in proud motoring attire, recline two mortals whom we have known in different conditions; the second chance has converted them into husband and wife. The man, of gross muddy build, lies luxurious on his back exuding affluence, a prominent part of him heaving playfully, like some little wave that will not rest in a still sea. A handkerchief over his face conceals from us what Colossus he may be, but his mate is our Lady Caroline. The nightingale trills on, and Lady Caroline takes up its song.

LADY CAROLINE. Is it not a lovely night, Jim. Listen, my own, to Philomel; he is saying that he is lately married. So are we, you ducky

thing. I feel, Jim, that I am Rosalind and that you are my Orlando.

(*The handkerchief being removed* MR. MATEY *is revealed; and the nightingale seeks some farther tree.*)

MATEY. What do you say I am, Caroliny?

LADY CAROLINE (*clapping her hands*). My own one, don't you think it would be fun if we were to write poems about each other and pin them on the tree trunks?

MATEY (*tolerantly*). Poems? I never knew such a lass for high-flown language.

LADY CAROLINE. Your lass, dearest. Jim's lass.

MATEY (*pulling her ear*). And don't you forget it.

LADY CAROLINE (*with the curiosity of woman*). What would you do if I were to forget it, great bear?

MATEY. Take a stick to you.

LADY CAROLINE (*so proud of him*). I love to hear you talk like that; it is so virile. I always knew that it was a master I needed.

MATEY. It 's what you all need.

LADY CAROLINE. It is, it is, you knowing wretch.

MATEY. Listen, Caroliny. (*He touches his money pocket, which emits a crinkly sound—the squeak of angels.*) That is what gets the ladies.

LADY CAROLINE. How much have you made this week, you wonderful man?

MATEY (*blandly*). Another two hundred or so. That 's all, just two hundred or so.

LADY CAROLINE (*caressing her wedding ring*). My dear golden fetter, listen to him. Kiss my fetter, Jim.

MATEY. Wait till I light this cigar.

LADY CAROLINE. Let me hold the darling match.

MATEY. Tidy-looking Petitey Corona, this. There was a time when one of that sort would have run away with two days of my screw.

LADY CAROLINE. How I should have loved, Jim, to know you when you were poor. Fancy your having once been a clerk.

MATEY (*remembering Napoleon and others*). We all have our beginnings. But it wouldn't have mattered how I began, Caroliny: I should

have come to the top just the same. (*Becoming a poet himself.*) I am a climber, and there are nails in my boots for the parties beneath me. Boots! I tell you if I had been a bootmaker, I should have been the first bootmaker in London.

LADY CAROLINE (*a humourist at last*). I am sure you would, Jim; but should you have made the best boots?

MATEY (*uxoriously wishing that others could have heard this*). Very good, Caroliny; that is the neatest thing I have heard you say. But it 's late; we had best be strolling back to our Rolls-Royce.

LADY CAROLINE (*as they rise*). I do hope the ground wasn't damp.

MATEY. Don't matter if it was; I was lying on your rug.

(*Indeed we notice now that he has had all the rug, and she the bare ground.* JOANNA *reaches the glade, now an unhappy lady who has got what she wanted. She is in country dress and is unknown to them as they are to her.*)

Who is the mournful party?

JOANNA (*hesitating*). I wonder, sir, whether you happen to have seen my husband? I have lost him in the wood.

MATEY. We are strangers in these parts ourselves, missis. Have we passed any one, Caroliny?

LADY CAROLINE (*coyly*). Should we have noticed, dear? Might it be that old gent over there? (*After the delightful manner of those happily wed she has already picked up many of her lover's favourite words and phrases.*)

JOANNA. Oh no, my husband is quite young.

(*The woodlander referred to is* MR. COADE *in gala costume; at his mouth a whistle he has made him from some friendly twig. To its ravishing music he is seen pirouetting charmingly among the trees, his new occupation.*)

MATEY (*signing to the unknown that he is wanted*). Seems a merry old cock. Evening to you, sir. Do you happen to have seen a young gentleman in the wood lately, all by himself, and looking for his wife?

COADE (*with a flourish of his legs*). Can't say I have.

JOANNE (*dolefully*). He isn't necessarily by himself; and I don't know that he is looking for me. There may be a young lady with him.

(*The more happily married lady smiles, and* JOANNA *is quick to take offence.*)

JOANNA. What do you mean by that?

LADY CAROLINE (*neatly*). Oho—if you like that better.

MATEY. Now, now, now—your manners, Caroliny.

COADE. Would he be singing or dancing?

JOANNA. Oh no—at least, I hope not.

COADE (*an artist to the tips*). Hope not? Odd! If he is doing neither I am not likely to notice him, but if I do, what name shall I say?

JOANNA (*gloating not*). Purdie; I am Mrs. Purdie.

COADE. I will try to keep a look-out, and if I see him . . . but I am rather occupied at present. . . . (*The reference is to his legs and a new step they are acquiring. He sways this way*

and that, and, whistle to lips, minuets off in the direction of Paradise.)

JOANNA (*looking elsewhere*). I am sorry I troubled you. I see him now.

LADY CAROLINE. Is he alone?

(JOANNA *glares at her.*)

Ah, I see from your face that he isn't.

MATEY (*who has his wench in training*). Caroliny, no awkward questions. Evening, missis, and I hope you will get him to go along with you quietly. (*Looking after* COADE.) Watch the old codger dancing.

(*Light-hearted as children they dance after him, while* JOANNA *behind a tree awaits her lord.* PURDIE *in knickerbockers approaches with misgivings to make sure that his* JOANNA *is not in hiding, and then he gambols joyously with a charming confection whose name is* MABEL. *They chase each other from tree to tree, but fortunately not round* JOANNA'S *tree.*)

MABEL (*as he catches her*). No, and no, and no. I don't know you nearly well enough for that. Besides, what would your wife say! I

shall begin to think you are a very dreadful man, Mr. Purdie.

PURDIE (*whose sincerity is not to be questioned*). Surely you might call me Jack by this time.

MABEL (*heaving*). Perhaps, if you are very good, Jack.

PURDIE (*of noble thoughts compact*). If only Joanna were more like you.

MABEL. Like me? You mean her face? It is a—well, if it is not precisely pretty, it is a good face. (*Handsomely*) I don't mind her face at all. I am glad you have got such a dependable little wife, Jack.

PURDIE (*gloomily*). Thanks.

MABEL (*seated with a moonbeam in her lap*). What would Joanna have said if she had seen you just now?

PURDIE. A wife should be incapable of jealousy.

MABEL. Joanna jealous? But has she any reason? Jack, tell me, who is the woman?

PURDIE (*restraining himself by a mighty effort, for he wishes always to be true to* JOANNA). Shall I, Mabel, shall I?

MABEL (*faltering, yet not wholly giving up the chase*). I can't think who she is. Have I ever seen her?

PURDIE. Every time you look in a mirror.

MABEL (*with her head on one side*). How odd, Jack, that can't be; when I look in a mirror I see only myself.

PURDIE (*gloating*). How adorably innocent you are, Mabel. Joanna would have guessed at once.

(*Slowly his meaning comes to her, and she is appalled.*)

MABEL. Not that!

PURDIE (*aflame*). Shall I tell you now?

MABEL (*palpitating exquisitely*). I don't know, I am not sure. Jack, try not to say it, but if you feel you must, say it in such a way that it would not hurt the feelings of Joanna if she happened to be passing by, as she nearly always is.

(*A little moan from* JOANNA'S *tree is unnoticed.*)

PURDIE. I would rather not say it at all than that way. (*He is touchingly anxious that she*

should know him as he really is.) I don't know, Mabel, whether you have noticed that I am not like other men. (*He goes deeply into the very structure of his being.*) All my life I have been a soul that has had to walk alone. Even as a child I had no hope that it would be otherwise. I distinctly remember when I was six thinking how unlike other children I was. Before I was twelve I suffered from terrible self-depreciation; I do so still. I suppose there never was a man who had a more lowly opinion of himself.

MABEL. Jack, you who are so universally admired.

PURDIE. That doesn't help; I remain my own judge. I am afraid I am a dark spirit, Mabel. Yes, yes, my dear, let me leave nothing untold however it may damage me in your eyes. Your eyes! I cannot remember a time when I did not think of Love as a great consuming passion; I visualised it, Mabel, as perhaps few have done, but always as the abounding joy that could come to others but never to me. I expected too much of women: I suppose I was

touched to finer issues than most. That has been my tragedy.

MABEL. Then you met Joanna.

PURDIE. Then I met Joanna. Yes! Foolishly, as I now see, I thought she would understand that I was far too deep a nature really to mean the little things I sometimes said to her. I suppose a man was never placed in such a position before. What was I to do? Remember, I was always certain that the ideal love could never come to me. Whatever the circumstances, I was convinced that my soul must walk alone.

MABEL. Joanna, how could you?

PURDIE (*firmly*). Not a word against her, Mabel; if blame there is the blame is mine.

MABEL. And so you married her.

PURDIE. And so I married her.

MABEL. Out of pity.

PURDIE. I felt it was a man's part. I was such a child in worldly matters that it was pleasant to me to have the right to pay a woman's bills; I enjoyed seeing her garments lying about on my chairs. In time that exultation wore off.

But I was not unhappy, I didn't expect much, I was always so sure that no woman could ever plumb the well of my emotions.

MABEL. Then you met me.

PURDIE. Then I met you.

MABEL. Too late—never—forever—forever—never. They are the saddest words in the English tongue.

PURDIE. At the time I thought a still sadder word was Joanna.

MABEL. What was it you saw in me that made you love me?

PURDIE (*plumbing the well of his emotions*). I think it was the feeling that you are so like myself.

MABEL (*with great eyes*). Have you noticed that, Jack? Sometimes it has almost terrified me.

PURDIE. We think the same thoughts; we are not two, Mabel; we are one. Your hair——

MABEL. Joanna knows you admire it, and for a week she did hers in the same way.

PURDIE. I never noticed.

MABEL. That was why she gave it up. And

it didn't really suit her. (*Ruminating.*) I can't think of a good way of doing dear Joanna's hair. What is that you are muttering to yourself, Jack? Don't keep anything from me.

PURDIE. I was repeating a poem I have written: it is in two words, 'Mabel Purdie.' May I teach it to you, sweet: say 'Mabel Purdie' to me.

MABEL (*timidly covering his mouth with her little hand*). If I were to say it, Jack, I should be false to Joanna: never ask me to be that. Let us go on.

PURDIE (*merciless in his passion*). Say it, Mabel, say it. See I write it on the gound with your sunshade.

MABEL. If it could be! Jack, I'll whisper it to you.

(*She is whispering it as they wander, not two but one, farther into the forest, ardently believing in themselves; they are not hypocrites. The somewhat bedraggled figure of* JOANNA *follows them, and the nightingale resumes his love-song. 'That's all you*

know, you bird!' thinks JOANNA *cynically. The nightingale, however, is not singing for them nor for her, but for another pair he has espied below. They are racing, the prize to be for the one who first finds the spot where the easel was put up last night. The hobbledehoy is sure to be the winner, for she is less laden, and the father loses time by singing as he comes. Also she is all legs and she started ahead. Brambles adhere to her, one boot has been in the water and she has as many freckles as there are stars in heaven. She is as lovely as you think she is, and she is aged the moment when you like your daughter best. A hoot of triumph from her brings her father to the spot.*)

MARGARET. Daddy, Daddy. I have won. Here is the place. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy!

(*He comes. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy, this engaging fellow in tweeds, is* MR. DEARTH, *ablaze in happiness and health and a daughter. He finishes his song, picked up in the Latin Quarter.*)

DEARTH. Yes, that is the tree I stuck my easel under last night, and behold the blessed moon behaving more gorgeously than ever. I am sorry to have kept you waiting, old moon; but you ought to know by now how time passes. Now, keep still, while I hand you down to posterity.

(*The easel is erected,* MARGARET *helping by getting in the way.*)

MARGARET (*critical, as an artist's daughter should be*). The moon is rather pale to-night, isn't she?

DEARTH. Comes of keeping late hours.

MARGARET (*showing off*). Daddy, watch me, look at me. Please, sweet moon, a pleasant expression. No, no, not as if you were sitting for it; that is too professional. That is better; thank you. Now keep it. That is the sort of thing you say to them, Dad.

DEARTH (*quickly at work*). I oughtn't to have brought you out so late; you should be tucked up in your cosy bed at home.

MARGARET (*pursuing a squirrel that isn't there*). With the pillow anyhow.

DEARTH. Except in its proper place.

MARGARET (*wetting the other foot*). And the sheet over my face.

DEARTH. Where it oughtn't to be.

MARGARET (*more or less upside down*). And Daddy tiptoeing in to take it off.

DEARTH. Which is more than you deserve.

MARGARET (*in a tree*). Then why does he stand so long at the door? And before he has gone she bursts out laughing, for she has been awake all the time.

DEARTH. That 's about it. What a life! But I oughtn't to have brought you here. Best to have the sheet over you when the moon is about; moonlight is bad for little daughters.

MARGARET (*pelting him with nuts*). I can't sleep when the moon 's at the full; she keeps calling to me to get up. Perhaps I am *her* daughter too.

DEARTH. Gad, you look it to-night.

MARGARET. Do I? Then can't you paint me into the picture as well as Mamma? You could call it 'A Mother and Daughter' or

simply 'Two ladies,' if the moon thinks that calling me her daughter would make her seem too old.

DEARTH. O matre pulchra filia pulchrior. That means, 'O Moon—more beautiful than any twopenny-halfpenny daughter.'

MARGARET (*emerging in an unexpected place*). Daddy, do you really prefer her?

DEARTH. 'Sh! She 's not a patch on you; it 's the sort of thing we say to our sitters to keep them in good humour. (*He surveys ruefully a great stain on her frock.*) I wish to heaven, Margaret, we were not both so fond of apple-tart. And what 's this! (*Catching hold of her skirt.*)

MARGARET (*unnecessarily*). It 's a tear.

DEARTH. I should think it is a tear.

MARGARET. That boy at the farm did it. He kept calling Snubs after me, but I got him down and kicked him in the stomach. He is rather a jolly boy.

DEARTH. He sounds it. Ye Gods, what a night!

MARGARET (*considering the picture*). And what

a moon! Dad, she is not quite so fine as that.

DEARTH. 'Sh! I have touched her up.

MARGARET. Dad, Dad—what a funny man!

(*She has seen* MR. COADE *with whistle, enlivening the wood. He pirouettes round them and departs to add to the happiness of others.* MARGARET *gives an excellent imitation of him at which her father shakes his head, then reprehensibly joins in the dance. Her mood changes, she clings to him.*)

MARGARET. Hold me tight, Daddy, I 'm frightened. I think they want to take you away from me.

DEARTH. Who, gosling?

MARGARET. I don't know. It 's too lovely, Daddy; I won't be able to keep hold of it.

DEARTH. What is?

MARGARET. The world—everything—and you, Daddy, most of all. Things that are too beautiful can't last.

DEARTH (*who knows it*). Now, how did you find that out?

MARGARET (*still in his arms*). I don't know, Daddy, am I sometimes stranger than other people's daughters?

DEARTH. More of a madcap, perhaps.

MARGARET (*solemnly*). Do you think I am sometimes too full of gladness?

DEARTH. My sweetheart, you do sometimes run over with it. (*He is at his easel again.*)

MARGARET (*persisting*). To be very gay, dearest dear, is so near to being very sad.

DEARTH (*who knows it*). How did you find that out, child?

MARGARET. I don't know. From something in me that 's afraid. (*Unexpectedly.*) Daddy, what is a 'might-have-been?'

DEARTH. A might-have-been? They are ghosts, Margaret. I daresay I 'might have been' a great swell of a painter, instead of just this uncommonly happy nobody. Or again, I might have been a worthless idle waster of a fellow.

MARGARET (*laughing*). You!

DEARTH. Who knows? Some little kink in me might have set me off on the wrong road. And that poor soul I might so easily have been might have had no Margaret. My word, I 'm sorry for him.

MARGARET. So am I. (*She conceives a funny picture.*) The poor old Daddy, wandering about the world without me!

DEARTH. And there are other 'might-have-beens'—lovely ones, but intangible. Shades, Margaret, made of sad folk's thoughts.

MARGARET (*jigging about*). I am so glad I am not a shade. How awful it would be, Daddy, to wake up and find one wasn't alive.

DEARTH. It would, dear.

MARGARET. Daddy, wouldn't it be awful! I think men need daughters.

DEARTH. They do.

MARGARET. Especially artists.

DEARTH. Yes, especially artists.

MARGARET. Especially artists.

DEARTH. Especially artists.

MARGARET (*covering herself with leaves and kicking them off*). Fame is not everything.

DEARTH. Fame is rot; daughters are the thing.

MARGARET. Daughters are the thing.

DEARTH. Daughters are the thing.

MARGARET. I wonder if sons would be even nicer?

DEARTH. Not a patch on daughters. The awful thing about a son is that never, never—at least, from the day he goes to school—can you tell him that you rather like him. By the time he is ten you can't even take him on your knee. Sons are not worth having, Margaret. Signed, W. Dearth.

MARGARET. But if you were a mother, Dad, I daresay he would let you do it.

DEARTH. Think so?

MARGARET. I mean when no one was looking. Sons are not so bad. Signed, M. Dearth. But I 'm glad you prefer daughters. (*She works her way toward him on her knees, making the tear larger.*) At what age are we nicest, Daddy? (*She has constantly to repeat her questions, he is so engaged with his moon.*) Hie, Daddy, at what age are we nicest? Daddy, hie, hie, at what age are we nicest?

DEARTH. Eh? That 's a poser. I think you were nicest when you were two and knew your alphabet up to G but fell over at H. No, you were best when you were half-past three; or just before you struck six; or in the mumps year, when I asked you in the early morning how you were and you said solemnly 'I haven't tried yet.'

MARGARET (*awestruck*). Did I?

DEARTH. Such was your answer. (*Struggling with the momentous question.*) But I am not sure that chicken-pox doesn't beat mumps. Oh Lord, I 'm all wrong. The nicest time in a father's life is the year before she puts up her hair.

MARGARET (*topheavy with pride in herself*). I suppose that is a splendid time. But there 's a nicer year coming to you. Daddy, there is a nicer year coming to you.

DEARTH. Is there, darling?

MARGARET. Daddy, the year she does put up her hair!

DEARTH (*with arrested brush*). Puts it up for ever? You know, I am afraid that when the

day for that comes I shan't be able to stand it. It will be too exciting. My poor heart, Margaret.

MARGARET (*rushing at him*). No, no, it will be lucky you, for it isn't to be a bit like that. I am to be a girl and woman day about for the first year. You will never know which I am till you look at my hair. And even then you won't know, for if it is down I shall put it up, and if it is up I shall put it down. And so my Daddy will gradually get used to the idea.

DEARTH (*wryly*). I see you have been thinking it out.

MARGARET (*gleaming*). I have been doing more than that. Shut your eyes, Dad, and I shall give you a glimpse into the future.

DEARTH. I don't know that I want that: the present is so good.

MARGARET. Shut your eyes, please.

DEARTH. No, Margaret.

MARGARET. Please, Daddy.

DEARTH. Oh, all right. They are shut.

MARGARET. Don't open them till I tell you. What finger is that?

DEARTH. The dirty one.

MARGARET (*on her knees among the leaves*). Daddy, now I am putting up my hair. I have got such a darling of a mirror. It is such a darling mirror I 've got, Dad. Dad, don't look. I shall tell you about it. It is a little pool of water. I wish we could take it home and hang it up. Of course the moment my hair is up there will be other changes also; for instance, I shall talk quite differently.

DEARTH. Pooh. Where are my matches, dear?

MARGARET. Top pocket, waistcoat.

DEARTH (*trying to light his pipe in darkness*). You were meaning to frighten me just now.

MARGARET. No. I am just preparing you. You see, darling, I can't call you Dad when my hair is up. I think I shall call you Parent.

(*He growls.*)

Parent dear, do you remember the days when your Margaret was a slip of a girl, and sat on your knee? How foolish we were, Parent, in those distant days.

DEARTH. Shut up, Margaret.

MARGARET. Now I must be more distant to

you; more like a boy who could not sit on your knee any more.

DEARTH. See here, I want to go on painting. Shall I look now?

MARGARET. I am not quite sure whether I want you to. It makes such a difference. Perhaps you won't know me. Even the pool is looking a little scared. (*The change in her voice makes him open his eyes quickly. She confronts him shyly.*) What do you think? Will I do?

DEARTH. Stand still, dear, and let me look my fill. The Margaret that is to be.

MARGARET (*the change in his voice falling clammy on her*). You 'll see me often enough, Daddy, like this, so you don't need to look your fill. You are looking as long as if this were to be the only time.

DEARTH (*with an odd tremor*). Was I? Surely it isn't to be that.

MARGARET. Be gay, Dad. (*Bumping into him and round him and over him.*) You will be sick of Margaret with her hair up before you are done with her.

DEARTH. I expect so.

MARGARET. Shut up, Daddy. (*She waggles her head, and down comes her hair.*) Daddy, I know what you are thinking of. You are thinking what a handful she is going to be.

DEARTH. Well, I guess she is.

MARGARET (*surveying him from another angle*). Now you are thinking about—about my being in love some day.

DEARTH (*with unnecessary warmth*). Rot!

MARGARET (*reassuringly*). I won't, you know; no, never. Oh, I have quite decided, so don't be afraid. (*Disordering his hair.*) Will you hate him at first, Daddy? Daddy, will you hate him? Will you hate him, Daddy?

DEARTH (*at work*). Whom?

MARGARET. Well, if there was?

DEARTH. If there was what, darling?

MARGARET. You know the kind of thing I mean, quite well. Would you hate him at first?

DEARTH. I hope not. I should want to strangle him, but I wouldn't hate him.

MARGARET. *I* would. That is to say, if I liked him.

DEARTH. If you liked him how could you hate him?

MARGARET. For daring!

DEARTH. Daring what?

MARGARET. You know. (*Sighing.*) But of course I shall have no say in the matter. You will do it all. You do everything for me.

DEARTH (*with a groan*). I can't help it.

MARGARET. You will even write my love-letters, if I ever have any to write, which I won't.

DEARTH (*ashamed*). Surely to goodness, Margaret, I will leave you alone to do that!

MARGARET. Not you; you will try to, but you won't be able.

DEARTH (*in a hopeless attempt at self-defence*). I want you, you see, to do everything exquisitely. I do wish I could leave you to do things a little more for yourself. I suppose it 's owing to my having had to be father and mother both. I knew nothing practically about the bringing up of children, and of course I couldn't trust you to a nurse.

MARGARET (*severely*). Not you; so sure you could do it better yourself. That 's you all

over. Daddy, do you remember how you taught me to balance a biscuit on my nose, like a puppy?

DEARTH (*sadly*). Did I?

MARGARET. You called me Rover.

DEARTH. I deny that.

MARGARET. And when you said 'snap' I caught the biscuit in my mouth.

DEARTH. Horrible!

MARGARET (*gleaming*). Daddy, I can do it still! (*Putting a biscuit on her nose.*) Here is the last of my supper. Say 'snap,' Daddy.

DEARTH. Not I.

MARGARET. Say 'snap,' please.

DEARTH. I refuse.

MARGARET. Daddy!

DEARTH. Snap.

(*She catches the biscuit in her mouth.*)

Let that be the last time, Margaret.

MARGARET. Except just once more. I don't mean now, but when my hair is really up. If I should ever have a—a Margaret of my own, come in and see me, Daddy, in my white bed, and say 'snap'—and I 'll have the biscuit ready.

DEARTH (*turning away his head*). Right O.

MARGARET. Dad, if I ever should marry, not that I will but if I should—at the marriage ceremony will you let me be the one who says 'I do'?

DEARTH. I suppose I deserve this.

MARGARET (*coaxingly*). You think I 'm pretty, don't you, Dad, whatever other people say?

DEARTH. Not so bad.

MARGARET. I *know* I have nice ears.

DEARTH. They are all right now, but I had to work on them for months.

MARGARET. You don't mean to say that you did my *ears?*

DEARTH. Rather!

MARGARET (*grown humble*). My dimple is my own.

DEARTH. I am glad you think so. I wore out the point of my little finger over that dimple.

MARGARET. Even my dimple! Have I anything that is really mine? A bit of my nose or anything?

DEARTH. When you were a babe you had a laugh that was all your own.

MARGARET. Haven't I it now?

DEARTH. It 's gone. (*He looks ruefully at her.*) I 'll tell you how it went. We were fishing in a stream—that is to say, I was wading and you were sitting on my shoulders holding the rod. We didn't catch anything. Somehow or another—I can't think how I did it—you irritated me, and I answered you sharply.

MARGARET (*gasping*). I can't believe that.

DEARTH. Yes, it sounds extraordinary, but I did. It gave you a shock, and, for the moment, the world no longer seemed a safe place to you; your faith in me had always made it safe till then. You were suddenly not even sure of your bread and butter, and a frightened tear came to your eyes. I was in a nice state about it I can tell you. (*He is in a nice state about it still.*)

MARGARET. Silly! (*Bewildered.*) But what has that to do with my laugh, Daddy?

DEARTH. The laugh that children are born with lasts just so long as they have perfect faith. To think that it was I who robbed you of yours!

MARGARET. Don't, dear. I am sure the laugh

just went off with the tear to comfort it, and they have been playing about that stream ever since. They have quite forgotten us, so why should we remember them? Cheeky little beasts! Shall I tell you my farthest back recollection? (*In some awe.*) I remember the first time I saw the stars. I had never seen night, and then I saw it and the stars together. Crack-in-my-eye-Tommy, it isn't every one who can boast of such a lovely, lovely recollection for their earliest, is it?

DEARTH. I was determined your earliest should be a good one.

MARGARET (*blankly*). Do you mean to say you planned it?

DEARTH. Rather! Most people's earliest recollection is of some trivial thing; how they cut their finger, or lost a piece of string. I was resolved my Margaret's should be something bigger. I was poor, but I could give her the stars.

MARGARET (*clutching him round the legs*). Oh, how you love me, Daddikins.

DEARTH. Yes, I do, rather.

(*A vagrant woman has wandered in their direction, one whom the shrill winds of life have lashed and bled; here and there ragged graces still cling to her, and unruly passion smoulders, but she, once a dear fierce rebel with eyes of storm, is now first of all a whimperer. She and they meet as strangers.*)

MARGARET (*nicely, as becomes an artist's daughter*). Good evening.

ALICE. Good evening, Missy; evening, Mister.

DEARTH (*seeing that her eyes search the ground*). Lost anything?

ALICE. Sometimes when the tourists have had their sandwiches there are bits left over, and they squeeze them between the roots to keep the place tidy. I am looking for bits.

DEARTH. You don't tell me you are as hungry as that?

ALICE (*with spirit*). Try me. (*Strange that he should not know that once loved husky voice.*)

MARGARET (*rushing at her father and feeling all his pockets*). Daddy, that was my last biscuit!

DEARTH. We must think of something else.

MARGARET (*taking her hand*). Yes, wait a bit, we are sure to think of something. Daddy, think of something.

ALICE (*sharply*). Your father doesn't like you to touch the likes of me.

MARGARET. Oh yes, he does. (*Defiantly.*) And if he didn't, I 'd do it all the same. This is a bit of *myself*, daddy.

DEARTH. That is all you know.

ALICE (*whining*). You needn't be angry with her, Mister; I 'm all right.

DEARTH. I am not angry with her; I am very sorry for you.

ALICE (*flaring*). If I had my rights, I would be as good as you—and better.

DEARTH. I daresay.

ALICE. I have had men-servants and a motor-car.

DEARTH. Margaret and I never rose to that.

MARGARET (*stung*). I have been in a taxi several times, and Dad often gets telegrams.

DEARTH. Margaret!

MARGARET. I 'm sorry I boasted.

ALICE. That 's nothing. I have a town house —at least I had . . . At any rate he said there was a town house.

MARGARET (*interested*). Fancy his not knowing for certain.

ALICE. The Honourable Mrs. Finch-Fallowe —that 's who I am.

MARGARET (*cordially*). It 's a lovely name.

ALICE. Curse him.

MARGARET. Don't you like him?

DEARTH. We won't go into that. I have nothing to do with your past, but I wish we had some food to offer you.

ALICE. You haven't a flask?

DEARTH. No, I don't take anything myself. But let me see. . . .

MARGARET (*sparkling*). I know! You said we had five pounds. (*To the needy one.*) Would you like five pounds?

DEARTH. Darling, don't be stupid; we haven't paid our bill at the inn.

ALICE (*with bravado*). All right; I never asked you for anything.

DEARTH. Don't take me up in that way: I

have had my ups and downs myself. Here is ten bob and welcome.

(*He surreptitiously slips a coin into* MARGARET'S *hand.*)

MARGARET. And I have half a crown. It is quite easy for us. Dad will be getting another fiver any day. You can't think how exciting it is when the fiver comes in; we dance and then we run out and buy chops.

DEARTH. Margaret!

ALICE. It 's kind of you. I 'm richer this minute than I have been for many a day.

DEARTH. It 's nothing; I am sure you would do the same for us.

ALICE. I wish I was as sure.

DEARTH. Of course you would. Glad to be of any help. Get some victuals as quickly as you can. Best of wishes, ma'am, and may your luck change.

ALICE. Same to you, and may yours go on.

MARGARET. Good-night.

ALICE. What is her name, Mister?

DEARTH (*who has returned to his easel*). Margaret.

ALICE. Margaret. You drew something good out of the lucky bag when you got her, Mister.

DEARTH. Yes.

ALICE. Take care of her; they are easily lost.

(*She shuffles away.*)

DEARTH. Poor soul. I expect she has had a rough time, and that some man is to blame for it—partly, at any rate. (*Restless.*) That woman rather affects me, Margaret; I don't know why. Didn't you like her husky voice? (*He goes on painting.*) I say, Margaret, we lucky ones, let 's swear always to be kind to people who are down on their luck, and then when we are kind let 's be a little kinder.

MARGARET (*gleefully*). Yes, let 's.

DEARTH. Margaret, always feel sorry for the failures, the ones who are always failures—especially in my sort of calling. Wouldn't it be lovely, to turn them on the thirty-ninth year of failure into glittering successes?

MARGARET. Topping.

DEARTH. Topping.

MARGARET. Oh, topping. How could we do it, Dad?

DEARTH. By letter. 'To poor old Tom Broken Heart, Top Attic, Garret Chambers, S.E.—'DEAR SIR,—His Majesty has been graciously pleased to purchase your superb picture of Marlow Ferry.'

MARGARET. '*P.S.*—I am sending the money in a sack so as you can hear it chink.'

DEARTH. What could we do for our friend who passed just now? I can't get her out of my head.

MARGARET. You have made me forget her. (*Plaintively.*) Dad, I didn't like it.

DEARTH. Didn't like what, dear?

MARGARET (*shuddering*). I didn't like her saying that about your losing me.

DEARTH (*the one thing of which he is sure*). I shan't lose you.

MARGARET (*hugging his arm*). It would be hard for me if you lost me, but it would be worse for you. I don't know how I know that, but I do know it. What would you do without me?

DEARTH (*almost sharply*). Don't talk like that, dear. It is wicked and stupid, and naughty. Somehow that poor woman—I won't paint any more to-night.

MARGARET. Let 's get out of the wood; it frightens me.

DEARTH. And you loved it a moment ago. Hullo! (*He has seen a distant blurred light in the wood, apparently from a window.*) I hadn't noticed there was a house there.

MARGARET (*tingling*). Daddy, I feel sure there wasn't a house there!

DEARTH. Goose. It is just that we didn't look: our old way of letting the world go hang; so interested in ourselves. Nice behaviour for people who have been boasting about what they would do for other people. Now I see what I ought to do.

MARGARET. Let 's get out of the wood.

DEARTH. Yes, but my idea first. It is to rouse these people and get food from them for the husky one.

MARGARET (*clinging to him*). She is too far away now.

DEARTH. I can overtake her.

MARGARET (*in a frenzy*). Don't go into that house, Daddy! I don't know why it is, but I am afraid of that house!

(*He waggles a reproving finger at her.*)

DEARTH. There is a kiss for each moment until I come back.

(*She wipes them from her face.*)

Oh, naughty, go and stand in the corner.

(*She stands against a tree but she stamps her foot.*)

Who has got a nasty temper!

(*She tries hard not to smile, but she smiles and he smiles, and they make comic faces at each other, as they have done in similar circumstances since she first opened her eyes.*)

I shall be back before you can count a hundred.

(*He goes off humming his song so that she may still hear him when he is lost to sight; all just as so often before. She tries dutifully to count her hundred, but the wood grows dark and soon she is afraid again.*

She runs from tree to tree calling to her Daddy. We begin to lose her among the shadows.)

MARGARET (*out of the impalpable that is carrying her away*). Daddy, come back; I don't want to be a might-have-been.

ACT III

ACT III

Lob's room has gone very dark as it sits up awaiting the possible return of the adventurers. The curtains are drawn, so that no light comes from outside. There is a tapping on the window, and anon two intruders are stealing about the floor, with muffled cries when they meet unexpectedly. They find the switch and are revealed as Purdie and his Mabel. Something has happened to them as they emerged from the wood, but it is so superficial that neither notices it: they are again in the evening dress in which they had left the house. But they are still being led by that strange humour of the blood.

MABEL (*looking around her curiously*). A pretty little room; I wonder who is the owner?

PURDIE. It doesn't matter; the great thing is that we have escaped Joanna.

MABEL. Jack, look, a man!

(*The term may not be happily chosen, but the person indicated is* LOB *curled up on his chair by a dead fire. The last look on his face before he fell asleep having been a leery one it is still there.*)

PURDIE. He is asleep.

MABEL. Do you know him?

PURDIE. Not I. Excuse me, sir, Hi! (*No shaking, however, wakens the sleeper.*)

MABEL. Darling, how extraordinary.

PURDIE (*always considerate*). After all, precious, have we any right to wake up a stranger, just to tell him that we are runaways hiding in his house?

MABEL (*who comes of a good family*). I think he would expect it of us.

PURDIE (*after trying again*). There is no budging him.

MABEL (*appeased*). At any rate, we have done the civil thing.

(*She has now time to regard the room more attentively, including the tray of coffee cups which* MATEY *had left on the table in a not unimportant moment of his history.*)

There have evidently been people here, but they haven't drunk their coffee. Ugh! cold as a deserted egg in a bird's nest. Jack, if you were a clever detective you could construct those people out of their neglected coffee cups. I wonder who they are and what has spirited them away?

PURDIE. Perhaps they have only gone to bed. Ought we to knock them up?

MABEL (*after considering what her mother would have done*). I think not, dear. I suppose we have run away, Jack—meaning to?

PURDIE (*with the sturdiness that weaker vessels adore*). Irrevocably. Mabel, if the dog-like devotion of a lifetime. . . . (*He becomes conscious that something has happened to* LOB'S *leer. It has not left his face but it has shifted.*) He is not shamming, do you think?

MABEL. Shake him again.

PURDIE (*after shaking him*). It 's all right. Mabel, if the dog-like devotion of a lifetime . . .

MABEL. Poor little Joanna! Still, if a woman insists on being a pendulum round a man's neck . . .

PURDIE. Do give me a chance, Mabel. If the dog-like devotion of a lifetime . . .

(JOANNA *comes through the curtains so inopportunely that for the moment he is almost pettish.*)

May I say, this is just a little too much, Joanna!

JOANNA (*unconscious as they of her return to her dinner gown*). So, sweet husband, your soul is still walking alone, is it?

MABEL (*who hates coarseness of any kind*). How can you sneak about in this way, Joanna? Have you no pride?

JOANNA (*dashing away a tear*). Please to address me as Mrs. Purdie, madam. (*She sees* LOB.) Who is this man?

PURDIE. We don't know; and there is no waking him. You can try, if you like.

(*Failing to rouse him* JOANNA *makes a third at table. They are all a little inconsequential, as if there were still some moonshine in their hair.*)

JOANNA. You were saying something about the devotion of a lifetime; please go on.

PURDIE (*diffidently*). I don't like to before you, Joanna.

JOANNA (*becoming coarse again*). Oh, don't mind me.

PURDIE (*looking like a note of interrogation*). I should certainly like to say it.

MABEL (*loftily*). And I shall be proud to hear it.

PURDIE. I should have liked to spare you this, Joanna; you wouldn't put your hands over your ears?

JOANNA (*alas*). No, sir.

MABEL. Fie, Joanna. Surely a wife's natural delicacy . . .

PURDIE (*severely*). As you take it in that spirit, Joanna, I can proceed with a clear conscience. If the dog-like devotion of a lifetime—

(*He reels a little, staring at* LOB, *over whose face the leer has been wandering like an insect.*)

MABEL. Did he move?

PURDIE. It isn't that. I am feeling—very funny. Did one of you tap me just now on the forehead?

(*Their hands also have gone to their foreheads.*)

MABEL. I think I have been in this room before.

PURDIE (*flinching*). There is something coming rushing back to me.

MABEL. I seem to know that coffee set. If I do, the lid of the milk jug is chipped. It is!

JOANNA. I can't remember this man's name; but I am sure it begins with L.

MABEL. Lob.

PURDIE. Lob.

JOANNA. Lob.

PURDIE. Mabel, your dress?

MABEL (*beholding it*). How on earth . . . ?

JOANNA. My dress! (*To* PURDIE.) You were in knickerbockers in the wood.

PURDIE. And so I am now. (*He sees he is not.*) Where did I change? The wood! Let me think. The wood . . . the wood, certainly. But the wood wasn't the wood.

JOANNA (*revolving like one in pursuit*). My head is going round.

MABEL. Lob's wood! I remember it all. We were here. We did go.

PURDIE. So we did. But how could . . . ? where was . . . ?

JOANNA. And who was . . . ?

MABEL. And what was . . . ?

PURDIE (*even in this supreme hour a man*). Don't let go. Hold on to what we were doing, or we shall lose grip of ourselves. Devotion. Something about devotion. Hold on to devotion. 'If the dog-like devotion of a lifetime . . .' Which of you was I saying that to?

MABEL. To me.

PURDIE. Are you sure?

MABEL (*shakily*). I am not quite sure.

PURDIE (*anxiously*). Joanna, what do you think? (*With a sudden increase of uneasiness.*) Which of you is my wife?

JOANNA (*without enthusiasm*). I am. No, I am not. It is Mabel who is your wife!

MABEL. Me?

PURDIE (*with a curious gulp*). Why, of course you are, Mabel!

MABEL. I believe I am!

PURDIE. And yet how can it be? I was running away with you.

JOANNA (*solving that problem*). You don't need to do it now.

PURDIE. The wood. Hold on to the wood.

The wood is what explains it. Yes, I see the whole thing. (*He gazes at* LOB.) You infernal old rascal! Let us try to think it out. Don't any one speak for a moment. Think first. Love . . . Hold on to love. (*He gets another tap.*) I say, I believe I am not a deeply passionate chap at all; I believe I am just . . . a philanderer!

MABEL. It is what you are,

JOANNA (*more magnanimous*). Mabel, what about ourselves?

PURDIE (*to whom it is truly a nauseous draught*). I didn't know. Just a philanderer! (*The soul of him would like at this instant to creep into another body.*) And if people don't change, I suppose we shall begin all over again now.

JOANNA (*the practical*). I daresay; but not with each other. I may philander again, but not with you.

(*They look on themselves without approval, always a sorry occupation. The man feels it most because he has admired himself most, or perhaps partly for some better reason.*)

PURDIE (*saying good-bye to an old friend*).

John Purdie, John Purdie, the fine fellow I used to think you! (*When he is able to look them in the face again.*) The wood has taught me one thing, at any rate.

MABEL (*dismally*). What, Jack?

PURDIE. That it isn't accident that shapes our lives.

JOANNA. No, it 's Fate.

PURDIE (*the truth running through him, seeking for a permanent home in him, willing to give him still another chance, loth to desert him*). It 's not Fate, Joanna. Fate is something outside us. What really plays the dickens with us is something in ourselves. Something that makes us go on doing the same sort of fool things, however many chances we get.

MABEL. Something in ourselves?

PURDIE (*shivering*). Something we are born with.

JOANNA. Can't we cut out the beastly thing?

PURDIE. Depends, I expect, on how long we have pampered him. We can at least control him if we try hard enough. But I have for the moment an abominably clear perception that the

likes of me never really tries. Forgive me, Joanna—no, Mabel—both of you. (*He is a shamed man.*) It isn't very pleasant to discover that one is a rotter. I suppose I shall get used to it.

JOANNA. I could forgive anybody anything to-night. (*Candidly.*) It is so lovely not to be married to you, Jack.

PURDIE (*spiritless*). I can understand that. I do feel small.

JOANNA (*the true friend*). You will soon swell up again.

PURDIE (*for whom, alas, we need not weep*). That is the appalling thing. But at present, at any rate, I am a rag at your feet, Joanna—no, at yours, Mabel. Are you going to pick me up? I don't advise it.

MABEL. I don't know whether I want to, Jack. To begin with, which of us is it your lonely soul is in search of?

JOANNA. Which of us is the fluid one, or the fluider one?

MABEL. Are you and I one? Or are you and Joanna one? Or are the three of us two?

JOANNA. He wants you to whisper in his ear, Mabel, the entrancing poem, 'Mabel Purdie.' Do it, Jack; there will be nothing wrong in it now.

PURDIE. Rub it in.

MABEL. When I meet Joanna's successor——

PURDIE (*quailing*). No, no, Mabel, none of that. At least credit me with having my eyes open at last. There will be no more of this. I swear it by all that is——

JOANNA (*in her excellent imitation of a sheep*). Baa-a, he is off again.

PURDIE. Oh Lord, so I am.

MABEL. Don't, Joanna.

PURDIE (*his mind still illumined*). She is quite right—I was. In my present state of depression —which won't last—I feel there is something in me that will make me go on being the same ass, however many chances I get. I haven't the stuff in me to take warning. My whole being is corroded. Shakespeare knew what he was talking about—

'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.'

JOANNA. For 'dear Brutus' we are to read 'dear audience' I suppose?

PURDIE. You have it.

JOANNA. Meaning that we have the power to shape ourselves?

PURDIE. We have the power right enough.

JOANNA. But isn't that rather splendid?

PURDIE. For those who have the grit in them, yes. (*Still seeing with a strange clearness through the chink the hammer has made.*) And they are not the dismal chappies; they are the ones with the thin bright faces. (*He sits lugubriously by his wife and is sorry for the first time that she has not married a better man.*) I am afraid there is not much fight in me, Mabel, but we shall see. If you catch me at it again, have the goodness to whisper to me in passing, 'Lob's Wood.' That may cure me for the time being.

MABEL (*still certain that she loved him once but not so sure why.*) Perhaps I will . . . as long as I care to bother, Jack. It depends on you how long that is to be.

JOANNA (*to break an awkward pause*). I feel that there is hope in that as well as a warning.

Perhaps the wood may prove to have been useful after all. (*This brighter view of the situation meets with no immediate response. With her next suggestion she reaches harbour.*) You know, we are not people worth being sorrowful about —so let us laugh.

(*The ladies succeed in laughing though not prettily, but the man has been too much shaken.*)

JOANNA (*in the middle of her laugh*). We have forgotten the others! I wonder what is happening to them?

PURDIE (*reviving*). Yes, what about them? Have *they* changed!

MABEL. I didn't see any of them in the wood.

JOANNA. Perhaps we did see them without knowing them; we didn't know Lob.

PURDIE (*daunted*). That 's true.

JOANNA. Won't it be delicious to be here to watch them when they come back, and see them waking up—or whatever it was we did.

PURDIE. What was it we did? I think something tapped me on the forehead.

MABEL (*blanching*). How do we know the others *will* come back?

JOANNA (*infected*). We don't know. How awful!

MABEL. Listen!

PURDIE. I distinctly hear some one on the stairs.

MABEL. It will be Matey.

PURDIE (*the chink beginning to close*). Be cautious both of you; don't tell him we have had any . . . odd experiences.

(*It is, however,* MRS. COADE *who comes downstairs in a dressing-gown and carrying a candle and her husband's muffler.*)

MRS. COADE. So you are back at last. A nice house, I must say. Where is Coady?

PURDIE (*taken aback*). Coady! Did he go into the wood, too?

MRS. COADE (*placidly*). I suppose so. I have been down several times to look for him.

MABEL. Coady, too!

JOANNA (*seeing visions*). I wonder . . . Oh, how dreadful!

MRS. COADE. What is dreadful, Joanna?

JOANNA (*airily*). Nothing. I was just wondering what he is doing.

MRS. COADE. Doing? What should he be doing? Did anything odd happen to you in the wood?

PURDIE (*taking command*). No, no, nothing.

JOANNA. We just strolled about, and came back. (*That subject being exhausted she points to* LOB.) Have you noticed him?

MRS. COADE. Oh, yes; he has been like that all the time. A sort of stupor, I think; and sometimes the strangest grin comes over his face.

PURDIE (*wincing*). Grin?

MRS. COADE. Just as if he were seeing amusing things in his sleep.

PURDIE (*guardedly*). I daresay he is. Oughtn't we to get Matey to him?

MRS. COADE. Matey has gone, too.

PURDIE. Wha-at!

MRS. COADE. At all events he is not in the house.

JOANNA (*unguardedly*). Matey! I wonder who is with him.

MRS. COADE. Must somebody be with him?

JOANNA. Oh, no, not at all.

(*They are simultaneously aware that some one outside has reached the window.*)

MRS. COADE. I hope it is Coady.

(*The other ladies are too fond of her to share this wish.*)

MABEL. Oh, I hope not.

MRS. COADE (*blissfully*). Why, Mrs. Purdie?

JOANNA (*coaxingly*). Dear Mrs. Coade, whoever he is, and whatever he does, I beg you not to be surprised. We feel that though we had no unusual experiences in the wood, others may not have been so fortunate.

MABEL. And be cautious, you dear, what you say to them before they come to.

MRS. COADE. 'Come to'? You puzzle me. And Coady didn't have his muffler.

(*Let it be recorded that in their distress for this old lady they forget their own misadventures.* PURDIE *takes a step toward the curtains in a vague desire to shield her;—and gets a rich reward: he has seen the coming addition to their circle.*)

PURDIE (*elated and pitiless*). It is Matey!

(*A butler intrudes who still thinks he is wrapped in fur.*)

JOANNA (*encouragingly*). Do come in.

MATEY. With apologies, ladies and gents. . . . May I ask who is host?

PURDIE (*splashing in the temperature that suits him best*). A very reasonable request. Third on the left.

MATEY (*advancing upon* LOB). Merely to ask, sir, if you can direct me to my hotel?

(*The sleeper's only response is a slight quiver in one leg.*)

The gentleman seems to be reposing.

MRS. COADE. It is Lob.

MATEY. What is lob, ma'am?

MRS. COADE (*pleasantly curious*). Surely you haven't forgotten?

PURDIE (*over-riding her*). Anything we can do for you, sir? Just give it a name.

JOANNA (*in the same friendly spirit*). I hope you are not alone: do say you have some lady friends with you.

MATEY (*with an emphasis on his leading word*). My wife is with me.

JOANNA His wife! . . . (*With commendation.*) You *have* been quick!

MRS. COADE. I didn't know you were married.

MATEY. Why should you, madam? You talk as if you knew me.

MRS. COADE. Good gracious, do you really think I don't?

PURDIE (*indicating delicately that she is subject to a certain softening*). Sit down, won't you, my dear sir, and make yourself comfy.

MATEY (*accustomed of late to such deferential treatment*). Thank you. But my wife . . .

JOANNA (*hospitably*). Yes, bring her in; we are simply dying to make her acquaintance.

MATEY. You are very good; I am much obliged.

MABEL (*as he goes out*). Who can she be?

JOANNA (*leaping*). Who, who, who!

MRS. COADE. But what an extraordinary wood! He doesn't seem to know who he is at all.

MABEL (*soothingly*). Don't worry about that, Coady darling. He will know soon enough.

JOANNA (*again finding the bright side*). And so will the little wife! By the way, whoever she is, I hope she is fond of butlers.

MABEL (*who has peeped*). It is Lady Caroline!

JOANNA (*leaping again*). Oh, joy, joy! And she was so sure she couldn't take the wrong turning!

(*Lady Caroline is evidently still sure of it.*)

MATEY. May I present my wife—Lady Caroline Matey.

MABEL (*glowing*). How do you do!

PURDIE. Your servant, Lady Caroline.

MRS. COADE. Lady Caroline Matey! You?

LADY CAROLINE (*without an* r *in her*). Charmed, I 'm sure.

JOANNA (*neatly*). Very pleased to meet any wife of Mr. Matey.

PURDIE (*taking the floor*). Allow me. The Duchess of Candelabra. The Ladies Helena and Matilda M'Nab. I am the Lord Chancellor.

MABEL. I have wanted so long to make your acquaintance.

LADY CAROLINE. Charmed.

JOANNA (*gracefully*). These informal meetings are so delightful, don't you?

LADY CAROLINE. Yes, indeed.

MATEY (*the introductions being thus pleasantly concluded*). And your friend by the fire?

PURDIE. I will introduce you to him when you wake up—I mean when he wakes up.

MATEY. Perhaps I ought to have said that I am *James* Matey.

LADY CAROLINE (*the happy creature*). *The* James Matey.

MATEY. A name not, perhaps, unknown in the world of finance.

JOANNA. Finance? Oh, so you did take that clerkship in the City!

MATEY (*a little stiffly*). I began as a clerk in the City, certainly; and I am not ashamed to admit it.

MRS. COADE (*still groping*). Fancy that, now. And did it save you?

MATEY. Save me, madam?

JOANNA. Excuse us—we ask odd questions in this house; we only mean, did that keep you honest? Or are you still a pilferer?

LADY CAROLINE (*an outraged swan*). Husband mine, what does she mean?

JOANNA. No offence; I mean a pilferer on a large scale.

MATEY (*remembering certain newspaper jealousy*).

If you are referring to that Labrador business —or the Working Women's Bank. . . .

PURDIE (*after the manner of one who has caught a fly*). O-ho, got him!

JOANNA (*bowing*). Yes, those are what I meant.

MATEY (*stoutly*). There was nothing proved.

JOANNA (*like one calling a meeting*). Mabel, Jack, here is another of us! You have gone just the same way again, my friend. (*Ecstatically.*) There is more in it, you see, than taking the wrong turning; you would always take the wrong turning. (*The only fitting comment.*) Tra-la-la!

LADY CAROLINE. If you are casting any aspersions on my husband, allow me to say that a prouder wife than I does not to-day exist.

MRS. COADE (*who finds herself the only clear-headed one*). My dear, do be careful.

MABEL. So long as you are satisfied, dear Lady Caroline. But I thought you shrank from all blood that was not blue.

LADY CAROLINE. You thought? Why should

you think about me? I beg to assure you that I adore my Jim.

(*She seeks his arm, but her* JIM *has encountered the tray containing coffee cups and a cake, and his hands close on it with a certain intimacy.*)

Whatever are you doing, Jim?

MATEY. I don't understand it, Caroliny; but somehow I feel at home with this in my hands.

MABEL. 'Caroliny!'

MRS. COADE. Look at me well; don't you remember me?

MATEY (*musing*). I don't remember you; but I seem to associate you with hard-boiled eggs. (*With conviction.*) You like your eggs hard-boiled.

PURDIE. Hold on to hard-boiled eggs! She used to tip you especially to see to them.

(MATEY's *hand goes to his pocket.*)

Yes, that was the pocket.

LADY CAROLINE (*with distaste*). Tip!

MATEY (*without distaste*). Tip!

PURDIE. Jolly word, isn't it?

MATEY (*raising the tray*). It seems to set me thinking.

LADY CAROLINE (*feeling the tap of the hammer*). Why is my work-basket in this house?

MRS. COADE. You are living here, you know.

LADY CAROLINE. That is what a person feels. But when did I come? It is very odd, but one feels one ought to say when did one go.

PURDIE. She is coming to with a wush!

MATEY (*under the hammer*). Mr. . . . Purdie!

LADY CAROLINE. Mrs. Coade!

MATEY. The Guv'nor! My clothes!

LADY CAROLINE. One is in evening dress!

JOANNA (*charmed to explain*). You will understand clearly in a minute, Caroliny. You didn't really take that clerkship, Jim; you went into domestic service; but in the essentials you haven't altered.

PURDIE (*pleasantly*). I 'll have my shaving water at 7.30 sharp, Matey.

MATEY (*mechanically*). Very good, sir.

LADY CAROLINE. Sir? Midsummer Eve! The wood!

PURDIE. Yes, hold on to the wood.

MATEY. You are . . . you are . . . you are Lady Caroline Laney!

LADY CAROLINE. It is Matey, the butler!

MABEL. You seemed quite happy with him, you know, Lady Caroline.

JOANNA (*nicely*). We won't tell.

LADY CAROLINE (*subsiding*). Caroline Matey! And I seemed to like it! How horrible!

MRS. COADE (*expressing a general sentiment*). It is rather difficult to see what we should do next.

MATEY (*tentatively*). Perhaps if I were to go downstairs?

PURDIE. It would be conferring a personal favour on us all.

(*Thus encouraged* MATEY *and his tray resume friendly relations with the pantry.*)

LADY CAROLINE (*with itching fingers as she glares at* LOB). It is all that wretch's doing.

(*A quiver from* LOB'S *right leg acknowledges the compliment. The gay music of a pipe is heard from outside.*)

JOANNA (*peeping*). Coady!

MRS. COADE. Coady! Why is he so happy?

JOANNA (*troubled*). Dear, hold my hand.

MRS. COADE (*suddenly trembling*). Won't he know me?

PURDIE (*abashed by that soft face*). Mrs. Coade, I 'm sorry. It didn't so much matter about the likes of us, but for your sake I wish Coady hadn't gone out.

MRS. COADE. We that have been happily married this thirty years.

COADE (*popping in buoyantly*). May I intrude? My name is Coade. The fact is I was playing about in the wood on a whistle, and I saw your light.

MRS. COADE (*the only one with the nerve to answer*). Playing about in the wood with a whistle!

COADE (*with mild dignity*). And why not, madam?

MRS. COADE. Madam! Don't you know me?

COADE. I don't know you. . . . (*Reflecting.*) But I wish I did.

MRS. COADE. Do you? Why?

COADE. If I may say so, you have a very soft, lovable face.

(*Several persons breathe again.*)

MRS. COADE (*inquisitorially*). Who was with you, playing whistles in the wood? (*The breathing ceases.*)

COADE. No one was with me.

(*And is resumed.*)

MRS. COADE. No . . . lady?

COADE. Certainly not. (*Then he spoils it.*) I am a bachelor.

MRS. COADE. A bachelor!

JOANNA. Don't give way, dear; it might be much worse.

MRS. COADE. A bachelor! And you are sure you never spoke to me before? Do think.

COADE. Not to my knowledge. Never . . . except in dreams.

MABEL (*taking a risk*). What did you say to her in dreams?

COADE. I said, 'My dear.' (*This when uttered surprises him.*) Odd!

JOANNA. The darling man!

MRS. COADE (*wavering*). How could you say such things to an old woman?

COADE (*thinking it out*). Old? I didn't think of you as old. No, no, young—with the

morning dew on your face—coming across a lawn—in a black and green dress—and carrying such a pretty parasol.

MRS. COADE (*thrilling*). That was how he first met me! He used to love me in black and green; and it *was* a pretty parasol. Look, I am old. . . . So it can't be the same woman.

COADE (*blinking*). Old? Yes, I suppose so. But it is the same soft, lovable face, and the same kind, beaming smile that children could warm their hands at.

MRS. COADE. He always liked my smile.

PURDIE. So do we all.

COADE (*to himself*). Emma!

MRS. COADE. He hasn't forgotten my name!

COADE. It is sad that we didn't meet long ago. I think I have been waiting for you. I suppose we have met too late? You couldn't overlook my being an old fellow, could you, eh?

JOANNA. How lovely; he is going to propose to her again. Coady, you happy thing, he is wanting the same soft face after thirty years!

MRS. COADE (*undoubtedly hopeful*). We mustn't be too sure, but I think that is it.

(*Primly.*) What is it exactly that you want, Mr. Coade?

COADE (*under a lucky star*). I want to have the right to hold the parasol over you. Won't you be my wife, my dear, and so give my long dream of you a happy ending?

MRS. COADE (*preening*). Kisses are not called for at our age, Coady, but here is a muffler for your old neck.

COADE. My muffler; I have missed it. (*It is however to his forehead that his hand goes. Immediately thereafter he misses his sylvan attire.*) Why . . . why . . . what . . . who . . . how is this?

PURDIE (*nervously*). He is coming to.

COADE (*reeling and righting himself*). Lob!

(*The leg indicates that he has got it.*)

Bless me, Coady, I went into that wood!

MRS. COADE. And without your muffler, you that are so subject to chills. What are you feeling for in your pocket?

COADE. The whistle. It is a whistle I—Gone! of course it is. It 's rather a pity. but . . . (*Anxious.*) Have I been saying awful things to you?

MABEL. You have been making her so proud. It is a compliment to our whole sex. You had a second chance, and it is her, again!

COADE. Of course it is. (*Crestfallen.*) But I see I was just the same nice old lazy Coady as before; and I had thought that if I had a second chance, I could do things. I have often said to you, Coady, that it was owing to my being cursed with a competency that I didn't write my great book. But I had no competency this time, and I haven't written a word.

PURDIE (*bitterly enough*). That needn't make you feel lonely in this house.

MRS. COADE (*in a small voice*). You seem to have been quite happy as an old bachelor, dear.

COADE. I am surprised at myself, Emma, but I fear I was.

MRS. COADE (*with melancholy perspicacity*). I wonder if what it means is that you don't especially need even me. I wonder if it means that you are just the sort of amiable creature that would be happy anywhere, and anyhow?

COADE. Oh dear, can it be as bad as that!

JOANNA (*a ministering angel she*). Certainly

not. It is a romance, and I won't have it looked upon as anything else.

MRS. COADE. Thank you, Joanna. You will try not to miss that whistle, Coady?

COADE (*getting the footstool for her*). You are all I need.

MRS. COADE. Yes; but I am not so sure as I used to be that it is a great compliment.

JOANNA. Coady, behave.

(*There is a knock on the window.*)

PURDIE (*peeping*). Mrs. Dearth! (*His spirits revive.*) She is alone. Who would have expected that of *her!*

MABEL. She is a wild one, Jack, but I sometimes thought rather a dear; I do hope she has got off cheaply.

(ALICE *comes to them in her dinner gown.*)

PURDIE (*the irrepressible*). Pleased to see you, stranger.

ALICE (*prepared for ejection.*) I was afraid such an unceremonious entry might startle you.

PURDIE. Not a bit.

ALICE (*defiant*). I usually enter a house by the front door.

PURDIE. I have heard that such is the swagger way.

ALICE (*simpering*). So stupid of me. I lost myself in the wood . . . and . . .

JOANNA (*genially*). Of course you did. But never mind that; do tell us your name.

LADY CAROLINE (*emerging again*). Yes, yes, your name.

ALICE. Of course, I am the Honourable Mrs. Finch-Fallowe.

LADY CAROLINE. Of course, of course!

PURDIE. I hope Mr. Finch-Fallowe is very well? We don't know him personally, but may we have the pleasure of seeing him bob up presently?

ALICE. No, I am not sure where he is.

LADY CAROLINE (*with point*). I wonder if the dear clever police know?

ALICE (*imprudently*). No, they don't.

(*It is a very secondary matter to her. This woman of calamitous fires hears and sees her tormentors chiefly as the probable owners of the cake which is standing on that tray.*)

So awkward, I gave my sandwiches to a poor

girl and her father whom I met in the wood, and now . . . isn't it a nuisance—I am quite hungry. (*So far with a mincing bravado.*) May I?

(*Without waiting for consent she falls to upon the cake, looking over it like one ready to fight them for it.*)

PURDIE (*sobered again*). Poor soul.

LADY CAROLINE. We are so anxious to know whether you met a friend of ours in the wood—a Mr. Dearth. Perhaps you know him, too?

ALICE. Dearth? I don't know any Dearth.

MRS. COADE. Oh dear, what a wood!

LADY CAROLINE. He is quite a front door sort of man; knocks and rings, you know.

PURDIE. Don't worry her.

ALICE (*gnawing*). I meet so many; you see I go out a great deal. I have visiting-cards—printed ones.

LADY CAROLINE. How very distingué. Perhaps Mr. Dearth has painted your portrait; he is an artist.

ALICE. Very likely; they all want to paint

me. I daresay that is the man to whom I gave my sandwiches.

MRS. COADE. But I thought you said he had a daughter?

ALICE. Such a pretty girl; I gave her half a crown.

COADE. A daughter? That can't be Dearth.

PURDIE (*darkly*). Don't be too sure. Was the man you speak of a rather chop-fallen, gone-to-seed sort of person.

ALICE. No, I thought him such a jolly, attractive man.

COADE. Dearth jolly, attractive! oh no. Did he say anything about his wife?

LADY CAROLINE. Yes, do try to remember if he mentioned her.

ALICE (*snapping*). No, he didn't.

PURDIE. He was far from jolly in her time.

ALICE (*with an archness for which the cake is responsible*). Perhaps that was the lady's fault.

(*The last of the adventurers draws nigh, carolling a French song as he comes.*)

COADE. Dearth's voice. He sounds quite merry!

JOANNA (*protecting*). Alice, you poor thing.

PURDIE. This is going to be horrible.

(*A clear-eyed man of lusty gait comes in.*)

DEARTH. I am sorry to bounce in on you in this way, but really I have an excuse. I am a painter of sorts, and . . .

(*He sees he has brought some strange discomfort here.*)

MRS. COADE. I must say, Mr. Dearth, I am delighted to see you looking so well. Like a new man, isn't he?

(*No one dares to answer.*)

DEARTH. I am certainly very well, if you care to know. But did I tell you my name?

JOANNA (*for some one has to speak*). No, but—but we have an instinct in this house.

DEARTH. Well, it doesn't matter. Here is the situation; my daughter and I have just met in the wood a poor woman famishing for want of food. We were as happy as grigs ourselves, and the sight of her distress rather cut us up. Can you give me something for her? Why are you looking so startled? (*Seeing the remains of the cake.*) May I have this?

(*A shrinking movement from one of them draws his attention, and he recognises in her the woman of whom he has been speaking. He sees her in fine clothing and he grows stern.*)

I feel I can't be mistaken; it was you I met in the wood? Have you been playing some trick on me? (*To the others.*) It was for her I wanted the food.

ALICE (*her hand guarding the place where his gift lies*). Have you come to take back the money you gave me?

DEARTH. Your dress! You were almost in rags when I saw you outside.

ALICE (*frightened as she discovers how she is now attired*). I don't . . . understand . . .

COADE (*gravely enough*). For that matter, Dearth, I daresay you were different in the wood, too.

(DEARTH *sees his own clothing.*)

DEARTH. What . . . !

ALICE (*frightened*). Where am I? (*To* MRS. COADE.) I seem to know you . . . do I?

MRS. COADE (*motherly*). Yes, you do; hold

my hand, and you will soon remember all about it.

JOANNA. I am afraid, Mr. Dearth, it is harder for you than for the rest of us.

PURDIE (*looking away*). I wish I could help you, but I can't; I am a rotter.

MABEL. We are awfully sorry. Don't you remember . . . Midsummer Eve?

DEARTH (*controlling himself*). Midsummer Eve? This room. Yes, this room. . . . You . . . was it you? . . . were going out to look for something. . . . The tree of knowledge, wasn't it? Somebody wanted me to go, too. . . . Who was that? A lady, I think. . . . Why did she ask me to go? What was I doing here? I was smoking a cigar. . . . I laid it down, there. . . . (*He finds the cigar.*) Who was the lady?

ALICE (*feebly*). Something about a second chance.

MRS. COADE. Yes, you poor dear, you thought you could make so much of it.

DEARTH. A lady who didn't like me—(*With conviction.*) She had good reasons, too—but what were they . . .?

ALICE. A little old man! He did it. What did he do?

(*The hammer is raised.*)

DEARTH. I am . . . it is coming back—I am not the man I thought myself.

ALICE. I am not Mrs. Finch-Fallowe. Who am I?

DEARTH (*staring at her*). You were that lady.

ALICE. It is you—my husband!

(*She is overcome.*)

MRS. COADE. My dear, you are much better off, so far as I can see, than if you were Mrs. Finch-Fallowe.

ALICE (*with passionate knowledge*). Yes, yes indeed! (*Generously.*) But he isn't.

DEARTH. Alice! . . . I—(*He tries to smile.*) I didn't know you when I was in the wood with Margaret. She . . . she . . . Margaret . . .

(*The hammer falls.*)

O my God!

(*He buries his face in his hands.*)

ALICE. I wish—I wish——

(*She presses his shoulder fiercely and then stalks out by the door.*)

PURDIE (*to* LOB, *after a time*). You old ruffian.

DEARTH. No, I am rather fond of him, our lonely, friendly little host. Lob, I thank thee for that hour.

(*The seedy-looking fellow passes from the scene.*)

COADE. Did you see that his hand is shaking again?

PURDIE. The watery eye has come back.

JOANNA. And yet they are both quite nice people.

PURDIE (*finding the tragedy of it*). We are all quite nice people.

MABEL. If she were not such a savage!

PURDIE. I daresay there is nothing the matter with her except that she would always choose the wrong man, good man or bad man, but the wrong man for her.

COADE. We can't change.

MABEL. Jack says the brave ones can.

JOANNA. 'The ones with the thin bright faces.'

MABEL. Then there is hope for you and me, Jack.

PURDIE (*ignobly*). I don't expect so.

JOANNA (*wandering about the room, like one renewing acquaintance with it after returning from a journey*). Hadn't we better go to bed? it must be getting late.

PURDIE. Hold on to bed! (*They all brighten.*)

MATEY (*entering*). Breakfast is quite ready.

(*They exclaim.*)

LADY CAROLINE. My watch has stopped.

JOANNA. And mine. Just as well perhaps!

MABEL. There is a smell of coffee.

(*The gloom continues to lift.*)

COADE. Come along, Coady; I do hope you have not been tiring your foot.

MRS. COADE. I shall give it a good rest to-morrow, dear.

MATEY. I have given your egg six minutes, ma'am.

(*They set forth once more upon the eternal round. The curious* JOANNA *remains behind.*)

JOANNA. A strange experiment, Matey; does it ever have any permanent effect?

MATEY (*on whom it has had none*). So far as I

know, not often, miss; but, I believe, once in a while.

(*There is hope in this for the brave ones. If we could wait long enough we might see the* DEARTHS *breasting their way into the light.*)

He could tell you.

(*The elusive person thus referred to kicks responsively, meaning perhaps that none of the others will change till there is a tap from another hammer. But when* MATEY *goes to rout him from his chair he is no longer there. His disappearance is no shock to* MATEY, *who shrugs his shoulders and opens the windows to let in the glory of a summer morning. The garden has returned, and our queer little hero is busy at work among his flowers. A lark is rising.*)

MARY ROSE

ACT I

ACT I

The scene is a room in a small Sussex manor house that has long been for sale. It is such a silent room that whoever speaks first here is a bold one, unless indeed he merely mutters to himself, which they perhaps allow. All of this room's past which can be taken away has gone. Such light as there is comes from the only window, which is at the back and is incompletely shrouded in sacking. For a moment this is a mellow light, and if a photograph could be taken quickly we might find a disturbing smile on the room's face, perhaps like the Monna Lisa's, which came, surely, of her knowing what only the dead should know. There are two doors, one leading downstairs; the other is at the back, very insignificant, though it is the centre of this disturbing history. The wall-paper, heavy in the adherence of other papers of a still older date, has peeled and leans forward here and there in a grotesque bow, as men have hung in chains; one might predict that the next sound heard here will be in the distant future when another piece of paper loosens. Save for two packing-cases, the only furni-

ture is a worn easy-chair doddering by the unlit fire, like some foolish old man. We might play with the disquieting fancy that this room, once warm with love, is still alive but is shrinking from observation, and that with our departure they cunningly set to again at the apparently never-ending search which goes on in some empty old houses.

Some one is heard clumping up the stair, and the caretaker enters. It is not she, however, who clumps; she has been here for several years, and has become sufficiently a part of the house to move noiselessly in it. The first thing we know about her is that she does not like to be in this room. She is an elderly woman of gaunt frame and with a singular control over herself. There may be some one, somewhere, who can make her laugh still, one never knows, but the effort would hurt her face. Even the war, lately ended, meant very little to her. She has shown a number of possible purchasers over the house, just as she is showing one over it now, with the true caretaker's indifference whether you buy or not. The few duties imposed on her here she performs conscientiously, but her greatest capacity is for sitting still in the dark. Her work over, her mind a blank, she sits thus rather than pay for a candle. One knows a little more about life when he knows the Mrs. Oterys, but she herself is unaware

that she is peculiar, and probably thinks that in some such way do people in general pass the hour before bedtime. Nevertheless, though saving of her candle in other empty houses, she always lights it on the approach of evening in this one.

The man who has clumped up the stairs in her wake is a young Australian soldier, a private, such as in those days you met by the dozen in any London street, slouching along it forlornly if alone, with sudden stoppages to pass the time (in which you ran against him), or in affable converse with a young lady. In his voice is the Australian tang that became such a friendly sound to us. He is a rough fellow, sinewy, with the clear eye of the man with the axe whose chief life-struggle till the war came was to fell trees and see to it that they did not crash down on him. Mrs. Otery is showing him the house, which he has evidently known in other days, but though interested he is unsentimental and looks about him with a tolerant grin.

MRS. OTERY. This was the drawing-room.

HARRY. Not it, no, no, never. This wasn't the drawing-room, my cabbage; at least not in my time.

MRS. OTERY (*indifferently*). I only came here

about three years ago and I never saw the house furnished, but I was told to say this was the drawing-room. (*With a flicker of spirit.*) And I would thank you not to call me your cabbage.

HARRY (*whom this kind of retort helps to put at his ease*). No offence. It's a French expression, and many a happy moment have I given to the mademoiselles by calling them cabbages. But the drawing-room! I was a little shaver when I was here last, but I mind we called the drawing-room the Big Room; it wasn't a little box like this.

MRS. OTERY. This is the biggest room in the house. (*She quotes drearily from some advertisement which is probably hanging in rags on the gate.*) Specially charming is the drawing-room with its superb view of the Downs. This room is upstairs and is approached by——

HARRY. By a stair, containing some romantic rat-holes. Snakes, whether it's the room or not, it strikes cold; there is something shiversome about it.

(*For the first time she gives him a sharp glance.*)

I've shivered in many a shanty in Australy, and thought of the big room at home and the warmth of it. The warmth! And now this is the best it can do for the prodigal when he returns to it expecting to see that calf done to a turn. We live and learn, missis.

MRS. OTERY. We live, at any rate.

HARRY. Well said, my cabbage.

MRS. OTERY. Thank you, my rhododendron.

HARRY (*cheered*). I like your spirit. You and me would get on great if I had time to devote to your amusement. But, see here, I can make sure whether this was the drawing-room. If it was, there is an apple-tree outside there, with one of its branches scraping on the window. I ought to know, for it was out at the window down that apple-tree to the ground that I slided one dark night when I was a twelve-year-old, ran away from home, the naughty blue-eyed angel that I was, and set off to make my fortune on the blasted ocean. The fortune, my—my lady friend—has still got the start of me, but the apple-tree should be there to welcome her darling boy.

(*He pulls down the sacking, which lets a*

little more light into the room. We see that the window, which reaches to the floor, opens outwards. There were probably long ago steps from it down into the garden, but they are gone now, and gone too is the apple-tree.)

I've won! No tree: no drawing-room.

MRS. OTERY. I have heard tell there was once a tree there; and you can see the root if you look down.

HARRY. Yes, yes, I see it in the long grass, and a bit of the seat that used to be round it. This is the drawing-room right enough, Harry, my boy. There were blue curtains to that window, and I used to hide behind them and pounce out upon Robinson Crusoe. There was a sofa at this end, and I had my first lessons in swimming on it. You are a fortunate woman, my petite, to be here drinking in these moving memories. There used to be a peacock, too. Now, what the hell could a peacock be doing in this noble apartment?

MRS. OTERY. I have been told a cloth used to hang on the wall here, tapestries they're called,

and that it had pictures of peacocks on it. I dare say that was your peacock.

HARRY. Gone, even my peacock! And I could have sworn I used to pull the feathers out of its tail. The clock was in this corner, and it had a wheezy little figure of a smith that used to come out and strike the hour on an anvil. My old man used to wind that clock up every night, and I mind his rage when he found out it was an eight-day clock. The padre had to reprove him for swearing. Padre? What's the English for padre? Damme, I'm forgetting my own language. Oh yes, parson. Is *he* in the land of the living still? I can see him clear, a long thin man with a hard sharp face. He was always quarrelling about pictures he collected.

MRS. OTERY. The parson here is a very old man, but he is not tall and thin, he is little and roundish with a soft face and white whiskers.

HARRY. Whiskers? I can't think he had whiskers. (*Ruminating.*) *Had* he whiskers? Stop a bit, I believe it is his wife I'm thinking about. I doubt I don't give satisfaction as a

sentimental character. Is there any objection, your ladyship, to smoking in the drawing-room?

MRS. OTERY (*ungraciously*). Smoke if you want.

(*He hacks into a cake of tobacco with a large clasp knife.*)

That's a fearsome-looking knife.

HARRY. Useful in trench warfare. It's not a knife, it's a visiting-card. You leave it on favoured parties like this.

(*He casts it at one of the packing-cases, and it sticks quivering in the wood.*)

MRS. OTERY. Were you an officer?

HARRY. For a few minutes now and again.

MRS. OTERY. You're playing with me.

HARRY. You're so *ir*resistible.

MRS. OTERY. Do you want to see the other rooms?

HARRY. I was fondly hoping you would ask me that.

MRS. OTERY. Come along then. (*She wants to lead him downstairs, but the little door at the back has caught his eye.*)

HARRY. What does that door open on?

MRS. OTERY (*avoiding looking at it*). Nothing, it's just a cupboard door.

HARRY (*considering her*). Who is playing with me now?

MRS. OTERY. I don't know what you mean. Come this way.

HARRY (*not budging*). I'll explain what I mean. That door—it's coming back to me—it leads into a little dark passage.

MRS. OTERY. That's all.

HARRY. That can't be all. Who ever heard of a passage wandering about by itself in a respectable house! It leads—yes—to a single room, and the door of the room faces this way.

(*He opens the door, and a door beyond is disclosed.*)

There's a memory for you! But what the hell made you want to deceive me?

MRS. OTERY. It's of no consequence.

HARRY. I think—yes—the room in there has two stone windows—and wooden rafters.

MRS. OTERY. It's the oldest part of the house.

HARRY. It comes back to me that I used to sleep there.

MRS. OTERY. That may be. If you'll come down with me——

HARRY. I'm curious to see that room first.

(*She bars the way.*)

MRS. OTERY (*thin-lipped and determined*). You can't go in there.

HARRY. Your reasons?

MRS. OTERY. It's—locked. I tell you it's just an empty room.

HARRY. There must be a key.

MRS. OTERY. It's—lost.

HARRY. Queer your anxiety to stop me, when you knew I would find the door locked.

MRS. OTERY. Sometimes it's locked; sometimes not.

HARRY. Is it not you that locks it?

MRS. OTERY (*reluctantly*). It's never locked, it's held.

HARRY. Who holds it?

MRS. OTERY (*in a little outburst*). Quiet, man.

HARRY. You're all shivering.

MRS. OTERY. I'm not.

HARRY (*cunningly*). I suppose you are just shivering because the room is so chilly.

MRS. OTERY (*falling into the trap*). That's it.

HARRY. So you *are* shivering!

(*She makes no answer, and he reflects with the help of his pipe.*)

May I put a light to these bits of sticks?

MRS. OTERY. If you like. My orders are to have fires once a week.

(*He lights the twigs in the fireplace, and they burn up easily, but will be ashes in a few minutes.*)

You can't have the money to buy a house like this.

HARRY. Not me. It was just my manly curiosity to see the old home that brought me. I'm for Australy again. (*Suddenly turning on her.*) What is wrong with this house?

MRS. OTERY (*on her guard*). There is nothing wrong with it.

HARRY. Then how is it going so cheap?

MRS. OTERY. It's—in bad repair.

HARRY. Why has it stood empty so long?

MRS. OTERY. It's—far from a town.

HARRY. What made the last tenant leave in such a hurry?

MRS. OTERY (*wetting her lips*). You have heard that, have you? Gossiping in the village, I suppose?

HARRY. I have heard some other things as well. I have heard they had to get a caretaker from a distance, because no woman hereabout would live alone in this house.

MRS. OTERY. A pack o' cowards.

HARRY. I have heard that that caretaker was bold and buxom when she came, and that now she is a scared woman.

MRS. OTERY. I'm not.

HARRY. I have heard she's been known to run out into the fields and stay there trembling half the night.

(*She does not answer, and he resorts to cunning again.*)

Of course, I see they couldn't have meant you. Just foolish stories that gather about an old house.

MRS. OTERY (*relieved*). That's all.

HARRY (*quickly as he looks at the little door*). What's that?

(MRS. OTERY *screams.*)

I got you that time! What was it you expected to see?

(*No answer.*)

Is it a ghost? They say it's a ghost. What is it gives this house an ill name?

MRS. OTERY. Use as brave words as you like when you have gone, but I advise you, my lad, to keep a civil tongue while you are here. (*In her everyday voice.*) There is no use showing you the rest of the house. If you want to be stepping, I have my work to do.

HARRY. We have got on so nicely I wonder if you would give me a mug of tea. Not a cup, we drink it by the mugful where I hail from.

MRS. OTERY (*ungraciously*). I have no objection.

HARRY. Since you are so pressing I accept.

MRS. OTERY. Come down then to the kitchen.

HARRY. No, no, I'm sure the Prodigal got his tea in the drawing-room, though what made them make such a fuss about that man beats me.

MRS. OTERY (*sullenly*). You are meaning to go into that room. I wouldn't if I was you.

HARRY. If you were me you would.

MRS. OTERY (*closing the little door*). Until I have your promise——

HARRY (*liking the tenacity of her*). Very well, I promise—unless, of course, she comes peeping out at the handsome gentleman. Your ghost has naught to do wi' me. It's a woman, isn't it?

(*Her silence is perhaps an assent.*)

See here, I'll sit in this chair till you come back, saying my prayers. (*Feeling the chair.*) You're clammy cold, old dear. It's not the ghost's chair by any chance, is it?

(*No answer.*)

You needn't look so scared, woman; she doesn't walk till midnight, does she?

MRS. OTERY (*looking at his knife in the wood*). I wouldn't leave that knife lying about.

HARRY. Oh, come, give the old girl a chance.

MRS. OTERY. I'll not be more than ten minutes.

HARRY. She can't do much in ten minutes.

(*At which remark* MRS. OTERY *fixes him with her eyes and departs.*

HARRY *is now sitting sunk in the chair, staring at the fire. It goes out, but he re-*

mains there motionless, and in the increasing dusk he ceases to be an intruder. He is now part of the room, the part long waited for, come back at last. The house is shaken to its foundation by his presence, we may conceive a thousand whispers. Then the crafty work begins. The little door at the back opens slowly to the extent of a foot. Thus might a breath of wind blow it if there were any wind. Presently HARRY *starts to his feet, convinced that there is some one in the room, very near his knife. He is so sure of the exact spot where she is that for a moment he looks nowhere else.*

In that moment the door slowly closes. He has not seen it close, but he opens it and calls out, 'Who is that? Is any one there?' With some distaste he enters the passage and tries the inner door, but whether it be locked or held it will not open. He is about to pocket his knife, then with a shrug of bravado sends it quivering back into the wood—for her if she can get it. He returns to the chair, but not to close his eyes; to watch and to be

watched. The room is in a tremble of desire to get started upon that nightly travail which can never be completed till this man is here to provide the end.

The figure of HARRY *becomes indistinct and fades from sight. When the haze lifts we are looking at the room as it was some thirty years earlier on the serene afternoon that began its troubled story. There are rooms that are always smiling, so that you may see them at it if you peep through the keyhole, and* MRS. MORLAND'S *little drawing-room is one of them. Perhaps these are smiles that she has left lying about. She leaves many things lying about; for instance, one could deduce the shape of her from studying that corner of the sofa which is her favourite seat, and all her garments grow so like her that her wardrobes are full of herself hanging on nails or folded away in drawers. The pictures on her walls in time take on a resemblance to her or hers though they may be meant to represent a waterfall, every present given to her assumes*

some characteristic of the donor, and no doubt the necktie she is at present knitting will soon be able to pass as the person for whom it is being knit. It is only delightful ladies at the most agreeable age who have this personal way with their belongings. Among MRS. MORLAND'S *friends in the room are several of whom we have already heard, such as the blue curtains from which* HARRY *pounced upon the castaway, the sofa on which he had his first swimming lessons, the peacock on the wall, the clock with the smart smith ready to step out and strike his anvil, and the apple-tree is in full blossom at the open window, one of its branches has even stepped into the room.*

MR. MORLAND *and the local clergyman are chatting importantly about some matter of no importance, while* MRS. MORLAND *is on her sofa at the other side of the room, coming into the conversation occasionally with a cough or a click of her needles, which is her clandestine way of telling her husband not to be so assertive to his guest. They are all*

middle-aged people who have found life to be on the whole an easy and happy adventure, and have done their tranquil best to make it so for their neighbours. The squire is lean, the clergyman of full habit, but could you enter into them you would have difficulty in deciding which was clergyman and which was squire; both can be peppery, the same pepper. They are benignant creatures, but could exchange benignancies without altering. MRS. MORLAND *knows everything about her husband except that she does nearly all his work for him. She really does not know this. His work, though he rises early to be at it, is not much larger than a lady's handkerchief, and consists of magisterial duties, with now and then an impressive scene about a tenant's cowshed. She then makes up his mind for him, and is still unaware that she is doing it. He has so often heard her say (believing it, too) that he is difficult to move when once he puts his foot down that he accepts himself modestly as a*

man of this character, and never tries to remember when it was that he last put down his foot. In the odd talks which the happily married sometimes hold about the future he always hopes he will be taken first, being the managing one, and she says little beyond pressing his hand, but privately she has decided that there must be another arrangement. Probably life at the vicarage is on not dissimilar lines, but we cannot tell as we never meet MR. AMY'S *wife.* MR. AMY *is even more sociable than* MR. MORLAND; *he is reputed to know every one in the county, and has several times fallen off his horse because he will salute all passers-by. On his visits to London he usually returns depressed because there are so many people in the streets to whom he may not give a friendly bow. He likes to read a book if he knows the residence or a relative of the author, and at the play it is far more to him to learn that the actress has three children, one of them down with measles, than to follow her histrionic genius. He and his host*

have the pleasant habit of print-collecting, and a very common scene between them is that which now follows. They are bent over the squire's latest purchase.)

MR. AMY. Very interesting. A nice little lot. I must say, James, you have the collector's flair.

MR. MORLAND. Oh, well, I'm keen, you know, and when I run up to London I can't resist going a bust in my small way. I picked these up quite cheap.

MR. AMY. The flair. That is what you have.

MR. MORLAND. Oh, I don't know.

MR. AMY. Yes, you have, James. You got them at Peterkin's in Dean Street, didn't you? Yes, I know you did. I saw them there. I wanted them too, but they told me you had already got the refusal.

MR. MORLAND. Sorry to have been too quick for you, George, but it is my way to nip in. You have some nice prints yourself.

MR. AMY. I haven't got your flair, James.

MR. MORLAND. I admit I don't miss much.

(*So far it has been a competition in saintliness.*)

MR. AMY. No. (*The saint leaves him.*) You missed something yesterday at Peterkin's though.

MR. MORLAND. How do you mean?

MR. AMY. You didn't examine the little lot lying beneath this lot.

MR. MORLAND. I turned them over; just a few odds and ends of no account.

MR. AMY (*with horrible complacency*). All except one, James.

MR. MORLAND (*twitching*). Something good?

MR. AMY (*at his meekest*). Just a little trifle of a Gainsborough.

MR. MORLAND (*faintly*). What! You've got it?

MR. AMY. I've got it. I am a poor man, but I thought ten pounds wasn't too much for a Gainsborough.

(*The devil now has them both.*)

MR. MORLAND. Ten pounds! Is it signed?

MR. AMY. No, it isn't signed.

MR. MORLAND (*almost his friend again*). Ah!

MR. AMY. What do you precisely mean by that 'Ah,' James? If it had been signed, could I have got it for ten pounds? You are always

speaking about your flair; I suppose I can have a little flair sometimes too.

MR. MORLAND. I am not always speaking about my flair, and I don't believe it is a Gainsborough.

MR. AMY (*with dignity*). Please don't get hot, James. If I had thought you would grudge me my little find—which *you* missed—I wouldn't have brought it to show you.

(*With shocking exultation he produces a roll of paper.*)

MR. MORLAND (*backing from it*). So that's it.

MR. AMY. This is it. (*The squire has to examine it like a Christian.*) There! I have the luck this time. I hope you will have it next. (*The exultation now passes from the one face into the other.*)

MR. MORLAND. Interesting, George—quite. But definitely not a Gainsborough.

MR. AMY. I say definitely a Gainsborough.

MR. MORLAND. Definitely not a Gainsborough.

(*By this time the needles have entered*

into the controversy, but they are disregarded.)

I should say the work of a clever amateur.

MR. AMY. Look at the drawing of the cart and the figure beside it.

MR. MORLAND. Weak and laboured. Look at that horse.

MR. AMY. Gainsborough did some very funny horses.

MR. MORLAND. Granted, but he never placed them badly. That horse destroys the whole balance of the composition.

MR. AMY. James, I had no idea you had such a small nature.

MR. MORLAND. I don't like that remark; for your sake I don't like it. No one would have been more pleased than myself if you had picked up a Gainsborough. But this! Besides, look at the paper.

MR. AMY. What is wrong with the paper, Mr. Morland?

MR. MORLAND. It is machine-made. Gainsborough was in his grave years before that paper was made.

(*After further inspection* MR. AMY *is convinced against his will, and the find is returned to his pocket less carefully than it had been produced.*)

Don't get into a tantrum about it, George.

MR. AMY (*grandly*). I am not in a tantrum, and I should be obliged if you wouldn't George me. Smile on, Mr. Morland, I congratulate you on your triumph; you have hurt an old friend to the quick. Bravo, bravo. Thank you, Mrs. Morland, for a very pleasant visit. Good day.

MRS. MORLAND (*prepared*). I shall see you into your coat, George.

MR. AMY. I thank you, Mrs. Morland, but I need no one to see me into my coat. Good day.

(*He goes, and she blandly follows him. She returns with the culprit.*)

MRS. MORLAND. Now which of you is to say it first?

MR. AMY. James, I am heartily ashamed of myself.

MR. MORLAND. George, I apologise.

MR. AMY. I quite see that it isn't a Gainsborough.

MR. MORLAND. After all, it's certainly in the Gainsborough school.

(*They clasp hands sheepishly, but the peace-maker helps the situation by showing a roguish face, and* MR. AMY *departs shaking a humorous fist at her*).

MRS. MORLAND. I coughed so often, James; and you must have heard me clicking.

MR. MORLAND. I heard all right. Good old George! It's a pity he has no flair. He might as well order his prints by wireless.

MRS. MORLAND. What is that?

MR. MORLAND. Wireless it's to be called. There is an article about it in that paper. The fellow says that before many years have passed we shall be able to talk to ships on the ocean.

MRS. MORLAND (*who has resumed her knitting*). Nonsense, James.

MR. MORLAND. Of course it's nonsense. And yet there is no denying, as he says, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

MRS. MORLAND (*becoming grave*). You and I know that to be true, James.

(*For a moment he does not know to what she is referring.*)

MR. MORLAND (*edging away from trouble*). Oh, that. My dear, that is all dead and done with long ago.

MRS. MORLAND (*thankfully*). Yes. But sometimes when I look at Mary Rose—so happy——

MR. MORLAND. She will never know anything about it.

MRS. MORLAND. No, indeed. But some day she will fall in love——

MR. MORLAND (*wriggling*). That infant! Fanny, is it wise to seek trouble before it comes?

MRS. MORLAND. She can't marry, James, without your first telling the man. We agreed.

MR. MORLAND. Yes, I suppose I must—though I'm not certain I ought to. Sleeping dogs— Still, I'll keep my word, I'll tell him everything.

MRS. MORLAND. Poor Mary Rose.

MR. MORLAND (*manfully*). Now then, none of that. Where is she now?

MRS. MORLAND. Down at the boat-house with Simon, I think.

MR. MORLAND. That is all right. Let her play about with Simon and the like. It may make a tomboy of her, but it will keep young men out of her head.

(*She wonders at his obtuseness.*)

MRS. MORLAND. You still think of Simon as a boy?

MR. MORLAND. Bless the woman, he is only a midshipman.

MRS. MORLAND. A sub-lieutenant now.

MR. MORLAND. Same thing. Why, Fanny, I still tip him. At least I did a year ago. And he liked it: 'Thanks no end, you are a trump,' he said, and then slipped behind the screen to see how much it was.

MRS. MORLAND. He is a very delightful creature; but he isn't a boy any more.

MR. MORLAND. It's not nice of you to put such ideas into my head. I'll go down to the boat-house at once. If this new invention was in working order, Fanny, I could send him packing without rising from my seat. I should

simply say from this sofa, 'Is my little Mary Rose there?'

(*To their surprise there is an answer from* MARY ROSE *unseen.*)

MARY ROSE (*in a voice more quaking than is its wont*). I'm here, Daddy.

MR. MORLAND (*rising*). Where are you, Mary Rose?

MARY ROSE. I am in the apple-tree.

(MRS. MORLAND *smiles and is going to the window, but her husband checks her with a further exhibition of the marvel of the future.*)

MR. MORLAND. What are you doing in the apple-tree, hoyden?

MARY ROSE. I'm hiding.

MR. MORLAND. From Simon?

MARY ROSE. No; I'm not sure whom I'm hiding from. From myself, I think. Daddy, I'm frightened.

MR. MORLAND. What has frightened you? Simon?

MARY ROSE. Yes—partly.

MR. MORLAND. Who else?

MARY ROSE. I am most afraid of my daddy.

MR. MORLAND (*rather flattered*). Of *me?*

(*If there is anything strange about this girl of eighteen who steps from the tree into the room, it is an elusiveness of which she is unaware. It has remained hidden from her girl friends, though in the after years, in the brief space before they forget her, they will probably say, because of what happened, that there was always something a little odd about* MARY ROSE. *This oddness might be expressed thus, that the happiness and glee of which she is almost overfull know of another attribute of her that never plays with them.*

There is nothing splendid about MARY ROSE, *never can she become one of those secret women so much less innocent than she, yet perhaps so much sweeter in the kernel, who are the bane or glory, or the bane and glory, of greater lovers than she could ever understand. She is just a*

rare and lovely flower, far less fitted than those others for the tragic rôle.

She butts her head into MRS. MORLAND *with a childish impulsiveness that might overthrow a less accustomed bosom.)*

MARY ROSE (*telling everything*). Mother!

MR. MORLAND. You don't mean that anything has really frightened you, Mary Rose?

MARY ROSE. I am not sure. Hold me tight, Mother.

MRS. MORLAND. Darling, has Simon been disturbing you?

MARY ROSE (*liking this way of putting it*). Yes, he has. It is all Simon's fault.

MR. MORLAND. But you said you were afraid even of me.

MARY ROSE. You are the only one.

MR. MORLAND. Is this some game? Where is Simon?

MARY ROSE (*in little mouthfuls*). He is at the foot of the tree. He is not coming up by the tree. He wants to come in by the door. That shows how important it is.

MR. MORLAND. What is?

MARY ROSE. You see, his leave is up to-morrow, and he—wants to see you, Daddy, before he goes.

MR. MORLAND. I am sure he does. And I know why. I told you, Fanny. Mary Rose, do you see my purse lying about?

MARY ROSE. Your purse, Dad?

MR. MORLAND. Yes, you gosling. There is a fiver in it, and *that* is what Master Simon wants to see me about.

(MARY ROSE *again seeks her mother's breast.*)

MRS. MORLAND. Oh, James! Dearest, tell me what Simon has been saying to you; whisper it, my love.

(MARY ROSE *whispers.*)

Yes, I thought it was that.

MARY ROSE. I am frightened to tell Daddy.

MRS. MORLAND. James, you may as well be told bluntly; it isn't your fiver that Simon wants, it is your daughter.

(MR. MORLAND *is aghast, and* MARY ROSE *rushes into his arms to help him in this terrible hour.*)

MARY ROSE (*as the injured party*). You will scold him, won't you, Dad?

MR. MORLAND (*vainly trying to push her from him*). By—by—by the—by all that is horrible I'll do more than scold him. The puppy, I'll—I'll——

MARY ROSE (*entreating*). Not more than scold him, Daddy—not more. Mary Rose couldn't bear it if it was more.

MR. MORLAND (*blankly*). You are not in love with Simon, are you?

MARY ROSE. Oh-h-h-h!

(*She makes little runnings from the one parent to the other, carrying kisses for the wounds.*)

Daddy, I am so awfully sorry that this has occurred. Mummy, what can we do? (*She cries.*)

MRS. MORLAND (*soothing her*). My own, my pet. But he is only a boy, Mary Rose, just a very nice boy.

MARY ROSE (*awed*). Mother, that is the wonderful, wonderful thing. He was just a boy—I quite understand that—he was a mere

boy till to-day; and then, Daddy, he suddenly changed; all at once he became a man. It was while he was—telling me. You will scarcely know him now, Mother.

MRS. MORLAND. Darling, he breakfasted with us; I think I shall know him still.

MARY ROSE. He is quite different from breakfast-time. He doesn't laugh any more, he would never think of capsizing the punt intentionally now, he has grown so grave, so manly, so—so *protective*, he thinks of everything now, of freeholds and leaseholds, and gravel soil, and hot and cold, and the hire system.

(*She cries again, but her eyes are sparkling through the rain.*)

MR. MORLAND (*with spirit*). He has got as far as that, has he! Does he propose that this marriage should take place to-morrow?

MARY ROSE (*eager to soften the blow*). Oh no, not for quite a long time. At earliest, not till his next leave.

MRS. MORLAND. Mary Rose!

MARY ROSE. He is waiting down there, Mummy. May I bring him in?

MRS. MORLAND. Of course, dearest.

MR. MORLAND. Don't come with him, though.

MARY ROSE. Oh! (*She wonders what this means.*) You know how shy Simon is.

MR. MORLAND. I do not.

MRS. MORLAND. Your father and I must have a talk with him alone, you see.

MARY ROSE. I—I suppose so. He so wants to do the right thing, Mother.

MRS. MORLAND. I am sure he does.

MARY ROSE. Do you mind my going upstairs into the apple-room and sometimes knocking on the floor? I think it would be a help to him to know I am so near by.

MRS. MORLAND. It would be a help to all of us, my sweet.

MARY ROSE (*plaintively*). You—you won't try to put him against me, Daddy?

MR. MORLAND. I would try my hardest if I thought I had any chance.

(*When she has gone they are a somewhat forlorn pair.*)

Poor old mother!

MRS. MORLAND. Poor old father! There couldn't be a nicer boy, though.

MR. MORLAND. No, but— (*He has a distressing thought.*)

MRS. MORLAND (*quietly*). Yes, there's that.

MR. MORLAND. It got me on the quick when she said, 'You won't try to put him against me, Daddy'—because that is just what I suppose I have got to do.

MRS. MORLAND. He must be told.

MR. MORLAND (*weakly*). Fanny, let us keep it to ourselves.

MRS. MORLAND. It would not be fair to him.

MR. MORLAND. No, it wouldn't. (*Testily.*) He will be an ass if it bothers him.

MRS. MORLAND (*timidly*). Yes.

(SIMON *comes in, a manly youth of twenty-three in naval uniform. Whether he has changed much since breakfast-time we have no means of determining, but he is sufficiently attractive to make one hope that there will be no further change in the immediate future. He seems younger even than his years because he is trying to look*

as if a decade or so had passed since the incident of the boat-house and he were now a married man of approved standing. He has come with honeyed words upon his lips, but suddenly finds that he is in the dock. His judges survey him silently, and he can only reply with an idiotic but perhaps ingratiating laugh.)

SIMON. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! (*He ceases uncomfortably, like one who has made his statement.*)

MR. MORLAND. You will need to say more than that, you know, Simon, to justify your conduct.

MRS. MORLAND. Oh, Simon, how could you!

SIMON (*with a sinking*). It seems almost like stealing.

MR. MORLAND. It is stealing.

SIMON (*prudently*). Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

(*From the ceiling there comes a gentle tapping, as from a senior officer who is indicating that England expects her lieutenant this day to do his duty.* SIMON *inflates.*)

It is beastly hard on you, of course; but if you knew what Mary Rose is!

MRS. MORLAND (*pardonably*). We feel that even we know to some extent what Mary Rose is.

SIMON (*tacking*). Yes, rather; and so you can see how it has come about. (*This effort cheers him.*) I would let myself be cut into little chips for her; I should almost like it. (*With a brief glance at his misspent youth.*) Perhaps you have thought that I was a rather larky sort in the past?

MR. MORLAND (*sarcastically*). We see an extraordinary change in you, Simon.

SIMON (*eagerly*). Have you noticed that? Mary Rose has noticed it too. That is my inner man coming out. (*Carefully.*) To some young people marriage is a thing to be entered on lightly, but that is not my style. What I want is to give up larks, and all that, and insure my life, and read the political articles.

(*Further knocking from above reminds him of something else.*)

Yes, and I promise you it won't be like losing a daughter but like gaining a son.

MRS. MORLAND. Did Mary Rose tell you to say that?

SIMON (*guiltily*). Well— (*Tap, tap.*) Oh, another thing, I should consider it well worth being married to Mary Rose just to have you, Mrs. Morland, for a mother-in-law.

MR. MORLAND (*pleased*). Well said, Simon; I like you the better for that.

MRS. MORLAND (*a demon*). Did she tell you to say that also?

SIMON. Well— At any rate, never shall I forget the respect and affection I owe to the parents of my beloved wife.

MR. MORLAND. She is not your wife yet, you know.

SIMON (*handsomely*). No, she isn't. But can she be? Mrs. Morland, can she be?

MRS. MORLAND. That is as may be, Simon. It is only a possible engagement that we are discussing at present.

SIMON. Yes, yes, of course. (*Becoming more difficult to resist as his reason goes.*) I used to be careless about money, but I have thought of a trick of writing the word Economy in the inside

of my watch, so that I'll see it every time I wind up. My people——

MR. MORLAND. We like them, Simon.

(*The tapping is resumed.*)

SIMON. I don't know whether you have noticed a sound from up above?

MR. MORLAND. I did think I heard something.

SIMON. That is Mary Rose in the apple-room.

MRS. MORLAND. No!

SIMON. Yes; she is doing that to help me. I promised to knock back as soon as I thought things were going well. What do you say? May I?

(*He gives them an imploring look, and mounts a chair, part of a fishing rod in his hand.*)

MR. MORLAND (*an easy road in sight*). I think, Fanny, he might?

MRS. MORLAND (*braver*). No. (*Tremulously.*) There is a little thing, Simon, that Mary Rose's father and I feel we ought to tell you about her before—before you knock, my dear. It is not very important, I think, but it is something she doesn't know of herself, and it makes her a little different from other girls.

SIMON (*alighting—sharply*). I won't believe anything against Mary Rose.

MRS. MORLAND. We have nothing to tell you against her.

MR. MORLAND. It is just something that happened, Simon. She couldn't help it. It hasn't troubled us in the least for years, but we always agreed that she mustn't be engaged before we told the man. We must have your promise, before we tell you, that you will keep it to yourself.

SIMON (*frowning*). I promise.

MRS. MORLAND. You must never speak of it even to her.

SIMON. Not to Mary Rose? I wish you would say quickly what it is.

(*They are now sitting round the little table.*)

MR. MORLAND. It can't be told quite in a word. It happened seven years ago, when Mary Rose was eleven. We were in a remote part of Scotland—in the Outer Hebrides.

SIMON. I once went on shore there from the *Gadfly*, very bleak and barren, rocks and rough grass, I never saw a tree.

MR. MORLAND. It is mostly like that. There is a whaling-station. We went because I was fond of fishing. I haven't had the heart to fish since. Quite close to the inn where we put up there is—a little island.

(*He sees that little island so clearly that he forgets to go on.*)

MRS. MORLAND. It is quite a small island, Simon, uninhabited, no sheep even. I suppose there are only about six acres of it. There are trees there, quite a number of them, Scotch firs and a few rowan-trees, they have red berries, you know. There seemed to us to be nothing very particular about the island, unless, perhaps, that it is curiously complete in itself. There is a tiny pool in it that might be called a lake, out of which a stream flows. It has hillocks and a glade, a sort of miniature land. That was all we noticed, though it became the most dreaded place in the world to us.

MR. MORLAND (*considerately*). I can tell him without your being here, Fanny.

MRS. MORLAND. I prefer to stay, James.

MR. MORLAND. I fished a great deal in the

loch between that island and the larger one. The sea-trout were wonderful. I often rowed Mary Rose across to the island and left her there to sketch. She was fond of sketching in those days, we thought them pretty things. I could see her from the boat most of the time, and we used to wave to each other. Then I would go back for her when I stopped fishing.

MRS. MORLAND. I didn't often go with them. We didn't know at the time that the natives had a superstition against landing on the island, and that it was supposed to resent this. It had a Gaelic name which means 'The Island that Likes to be Visited.' Mary Rose knew nothing of this, and she was very fond of her island. She used to talk to it, call it her darling, things like that.

SIMON (*restless*). Tell me what happened.

MR. MORLAND. It was on what was to be our last day. I had landed her on this island as usual, and in the early evening I pulled across to take her off. From the boat I saw her, sitting on a stump of a tree that was her favourite seat, and she waved gaily to me and I to her.

Then I rowed over, with, of course, my back to her. I had less than a hundred yards to go, but, Simon, when I got across she wasn't there.

SIMON. You seem so serious about it. She was hiding from you?

MRS. MORLAND. She wasn't on the island, Simon.

SIMON. But—but—oh, but——

MR. MORLAND. Don't you think I searched and searched?

MRS. MORLAND. All of us. No one in the village went to bed that night. It was then we learned how they feared the island.

MR. MORLAND. The little pool was dragged. There was nothing we didn't try; but she was gone.

SIMON (*distressed*). I can't—there couldn't—but never mind that. Tell me how you found her.

MRS. MORLAND. It was the twentieth day after she disappeared. Twenty days!

SIMON. Some boat——?

MR. MORLAND. There was no boat but mine.

SIMON. Tell me.

MRS. MORLAND. The search had long been given up, but we couldn't come away.

MR. MORLAND. I was wandering one day along the shore of the loch, you can imagine in what state of mind. I stopped and stood looking across the water at the island, and, Simon, I saw her sitting on the tree-trunk sketching.

MRS. MORLAND. Mary Rose!

MR. MORLAND. She waved to me and went on sketching. I—I waved back to her. I got into the boat and rowed across just in the old way, except that I sat facing her, so that I could see her all the time. When I landed, the first thing she said to me was, 'Why did you row in that funny way, Dad?' Then I saw at once that she didn't know anything had happened.

SIMON. Mr. Morland! How could—? Where did she say she had been?

MRS. MORLAND. She didn't know she had been anywhere, Simon.

MR. MORLAND. She thought I had just come for her at the usual time.

SIMON. Twenty days. You mean she had been on the island all that time?

MR. MORLAND. We don't know.

MRS. MORLAND. James brought her back to me just the same merry unselfconscious girl, with no idea that she had been away from me for more than an hour or two.

SIMON. But when you told her——

MRS. MORLAND. We never told her; she doesn't know now.

SIMON. Surely you——

MRS. MORLAND. We had her back again, Simon; that was the great thing. At first we thought to tell her after we got her home; and then, it was all so inexplicable, we were afraid to alarm her, to take the bloom off her. In the end we decided never to tell her.

SIMON. You told no one?

MR. MORLAND. Several doctors.

SIMON. How did they explain it?

MR. MORLAND. They had no explanation for it except that it never took place. You can think that, too, if you like.

SIMON. I don't know what to think. It has had no effect on her, at any rate.

MR. MORLAND. None whatever—and you can guess how we used to watch.

MRS. MORLAND. Simon, I am very anxious to be honest with you. I have sometimes thought that our girl is curiously young for her age—as if—you know how just a touch of frost may stop the growth of a plant and yet leave it blooming—it has sometimes seemed to me as if a cold finger had once touched my Mary Rose.

SIMON. Mrs. Morland!

MRS. MORLAND. There is nothing in it.

SIMON. What you are worrying about is just her innocence—which seems a holy thing to me.

MRS. MORLAND. And indeed it is.

SIMON. If that is all——

MR. MORLAND. We have sometimes thought that she had momentary glimpses back into that time, but before we could question her in a cautious way about them the gates had closed and she remembered nothing. You never saw her talking to—to some person who wasn't there?

SIMON. No.

MRS. MORLAND. Nor listening, as it were, for some sound that never came?

SIMON. A sound? Do you mean a sound from the island?

MRS. MORLAND. Yes, we think so. But at any rate she has long outgrown those fancies.

(*She fetches a sketch-book from a drawer.*)

Here are the sketches she made. You can take the book away with you and look at them at your leisure.

SIMON. It is a little curious that she has never spoken to me of that holiday. She tells me everything.

MRS. MORLAND. No, that isn't curious, it is just that the island has faded from her memory. I should be troubled if she began to recall it. Well, Simon, we felt we had to tell you. That is all we know, I am sure it is all we shall ever know. What are you going to do?

SIMON. What do you think!

(*He mounts the chair again, and knocks triumphantly. A happy tapping replies.*)

You heard? That means it's all right. You'll see how she'll come tearing down to us!

MRS. MORLAND (*kissing him*). You dear boy, you will see how I shall go tearing up to her. (*She goes off.*)

SIMON. I do love Mary Rose, sir.

MR. MORLAND. So do we, Simon. I suppose that made us love her a little more than other daughters are loved. Well, it is dead and done with, and it doesn't disturb me now at all. I hope you won't let it disturb you.

SIMON (*undisturbed*). Rather not. (*Disturbed.*) I say, I wonder whether I *have* noticed her listening for a sound?

MR. MORLAND. Not you. We did wisely, didn't we, in not questioning her?

SIMON. Oh, lord, yes. 'The Island that Likes to be Visited.' It is a queer name. (*Boyishly.*) I say, let's forget all about it. (*He looks at the ceiling.*) I almost wish her mother hadn't gone up to her. It will make Mary Rose longer in coming down.

MR. MORLAND (*humorous*). Fanny will think of nicer things to say to her than you could think of, Simon.

SIMON. Yes, I know. Ah, now you are

chaffing me. (*Apologetically.*) You see, sir, my leave is up to-morrow.

(MARY ROSE *comes rushing in.*)

Mary Rose!

(*She darts past him into her father's arms.*)

MARY ROSE. It isn't you I am thinking of; it is father, it is poor father. Oh, Simon, how could you? Isn't it hateful of him, Daddy!

MR. MORLAND. I should just say it is. Is your mother crying too?

MARY ROSE (*squeaking*). Yes.

MR. MORLAND. I see I am going to have an abominable day. If you two don't mind very much being left alone, I think I'll go up and sit in the apple-room and cry with your mother. It is close and dark and musty up there, and when we feel we can't stick it any longer I'll knock on the floor, Simon, as a sign that we are coming down.

(*He departs on this light note. We see how the minds of these two children match.*)

SIMON. Mary Rose!

MARY ROSE. Oh, Simon—you and me.

SIMON. You and me, that's it. We are *us*, now. Do you like it?

MARY ROSE. It is so fearfully solemn.

SIMON. You are not frightened, are you?

(*She nods.*)

Not at me?

(*She shakes her head.*)

What at?

MARY ROSE. At *it*— Being—married. Simon, after we are married you will sometimes let me play, won't you?

SIMON. Games?

(*She nods.*)

Rather. Why, I'll go on playing rugger myself. Lots of married people play games.

MARY ROSE (*relieved*). I'm glad; Simon, do you love me?

SIMON. Dearest — precious — my life — my sweetheart. Which name do you like best?

MARY ROSE. I'm not sure. They are all very nice. (*She is conscious of the ceiling.*) Oughtn't we to knock to those beloveds to come down?

SIMON. Please don't. I know a lot about old people, darling. I assure you they don't mind very much sitting in dull places.

MARY ROSE. We mustn't be selfish.

SIMON. Honest Injun, is isn't selfishness. You see, I have a ton of things to tell you. About how I put it to them, and how I remembered what you told me to say, and the way I got the soft side of them. They have heard it all already, so it would really be selfish to bring them down.

MARY ROSE. I'm not so sure.

SIMON. I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's go back to the boat-house, and then they can come down and be cosy here.

MARY ROSE (*gleeful*). Let's! We can stay there till tea-time. (*She wants to whirl him away at once.*)

SIMON. It is fresh down there; put on a jacket, my star.

MARY ROSE. Oh, bother!

SIMON (*firmly*). My child, you are in my care now; I am responsible for you, and I order you to put on a jacket.

MARY ROSE. Order! Simon, you do say the loveliest things. I'll put it on at once.

(*She is going towards the little door at the back, but turns to say something important.*)

Simon, I'll tell you a funny thing about me.

I may be wrong, but I think I'll sometimes love you to kiss me, and sometimes it will be better not.

SIMON. All right. Tell me, what were you thinking as you sat up there in the apple-room, waiting?

MARY ROSE. Holy things.

SIMON. About love?

(*She nods.*)

MARY ROSE. We'll try to be good, won't we, Simon, please?

SIMON. Rather. Honest Injun, we'll be nailers. Did you think of—our wedding-day?

MARY ROSE. A little.

SIMON. Only a little?

MARY ROSE. But frightfully clearly. (*Suddenly.*) Simon, I had such a delicious idea about our honeymoon. There is a place in Scotland—in the Hebrides—I should love to go there.

SIMON (*taken aback*). The Hebrides?

MARY ROSE. We once went to it when I was little. Isn't it funny, I had almost forgotten about that island, and then suddenly I saw it quite clearly as I was sitting up there. (*Sense-*

lessly.) Of course it was the little old woman who pointed it out to me.

(SIMON *is disturbed.*)

SIMON (*gently*). Mary Rose, there are only yourselves and the three maids in the house, aren't there?

MARY ROSE (*surprised*). You know there are. Whatever makes you ask?

SIMON (*cautiously*). I thought—I thought I had a glimpse of a little old woman on the stair to-day.

MARY ROSE (*interested*). Who on earth could that be?

SIMON. It doesn't matter, I had made a mistake. Tell me, what was there particular about that place in the Hebrides?

MARY ROSE. Oh, the fishing for father. But there was an island where I often— My little island!

SIMON (*perhaps quite unnecessarily*). What are you listening for, Mary Rose?

MARY ROSE. Was I? I don't hear anything. Oh, my dear, my dear, I should love to show you the tree-trunk and the rowan-tree

where I used to sketch while father was in the boat. I expect he used to land me on the island because it was such a safe place.

SIMON (*troubled*). That had been the idea. I am not going to spend my honeymoon by the sea, though. And yet I should like to go to the Hebrides—some day—to see that island.

MARY ROSE. Yes, let's.

(*She darts off through the little door for her jacket.*)

ACT II

ACT II

An island in the Outer Hebrides. A hundred yards away, across the loch at the back, may be seen the greater island of which this might be but a stone cast into the sea by some giant hand: perhaps an evil stone which the big island had to spew forth but could not sink. It is fair to look upon to-day, all its menace hidden under mosses of various hues that are a bath to the eye; an island placid as a cow grazing or a sulky lady asleep. The sun which has left the bleak hills beyond is playing hide and seek on it—one suddenly has the curious fancy to ask, with whom? A blessed spot it might be thought, rather than sinister, were there not those two trees, a fir and a rowan, their arms outstretched for ever southward, as if they had been struck while in full flight and could no longer pray to their gods to carry them away from this island. A young Highlander, a Cameron, passes in a boat at the back. Mary Rose and Simon come into view on the island. We have already heard them swishing a way through whins and bracken that are unseen. They are dressed as English people dress in Scotland.

They have been married for four years and are still the gay young creatures of their engagement day. Their talk is the happy nonsense that leaves no ripple unless the unexpected happens.

MARY ROSE (*thrilled*). I think, I think, I don't think at all, I am quite sure. This is the place. Simon, kiss me, kiss me quick. You promised to kiss me quick when we found the place.

SIMON (*obeying*). I am not the man to break my word. At the same time, Mary Rose, I would point out to you that this is the third spot you have picked out as being the place, and three times have I kissed you quick on that understanding. This can't go on, you know. As for your wonderful island, it turns out to be about the size of the Round Pond.

MARY ROSE. I always said it was little like myself.

SIMON. It was obviously made to fit you, or you to fit it; one of you was measured for the other. At any rate, we have now been all round it, and all through it, as my bleeding limbs

testify. (*The whins have been tearing at him, and he rubs his legs.*)

MARY ROSE. They didn't hurt me at all.

SIMON. Perhaps they like you better than me. Well, we have made a good search for the place where you used to sit and sketch, and you must now take your choice.

MARY ROSE. It was here. I told you of the fir and the rowan-tree.

SIMON. There were a fir and a rowan at each of the other places.

MARY ROSE. Not this fir, not this rowan.

SIMON. You have me there.

MARY ROSE. Simon, I know I'm not clever, but I'm always right. The rowan-berries! I used to put them in my hair. (*She puts them in her hair again.*) Darling rowan-tree, are you glad to see me back? You don't look a bit older, how do you think *I* am wearing? I shall tell you a secret. You too, firry. Come closer, both of you. Put your arms around me, and listen: I am married!

(*The branch of which she has been making a scarf disengages itself.*)

It didn't like that, Simon, it is jealous. After

all, it knew me first. Dearest trees, if I had known that you felt for me in that way—but it is too late now. I have been married for nearly four years, and this is the man. His name is Lieutenant Simon Sobersides. (*She darts about making discoveries.*)

SIMON (*tranquilly smoking*). What is it now?

MARY ROSE. That moss! I feel sure there is a tree-trunk beneath it, the very root on which I used to sit and sketch.

(*He clears away some of the moss.*)

SIMON. It is a tree-trunk right enough.

MARY ROSE. I believe—I believe I cut my name on it with a knife.

SIMON. This looks like it. 'M—A—R—' and there it stops. That is always where the blade of the knife breaks.

MARY ROSE. My ownest seat, how I have missed you.

SIMON. Don't you believe it, old tree-trunk. She had forgotten all about you, and you just came vaguely back to her mind because we happened to be in the neighbourhood.

MARY ROSE. Yes, I suppose that is true. You were the one who wanted to come, Simon. I wonder why?

SIMON (*with his answer ready*). No particular reason. I wanted to see a place you had visited as a child; that was all. But what a trumpery island it proves to be.

MARY ROSE (*who perhaps agrees with him*). How can you? Even if it is true, you needn't say it before them all, hurting their feelings. Dear seat, here is one for each year I have been away. (*She kisses the trunk a number of times.*)

SIMON (*counting*). Eleven. Go on, give it all the news. Tell it we don't have a house of our own yet.

MARY ROSE. You see, dear seat, we live with my daddy and mother, because Simon is so often away at sea. You know, the loveliest thing in the world is the navy, and the loveliest thing in the navy is H.M.S. *Valiant*, and the loveliest thing on H.M.S. *Valiant* is Lieutenant Simon Sobersides, and the loveliest thing on Lieutenant Simon Sobersides is the little tuft of hair which

will keep standing up at the back of his head.

(SIMON, *who is lolling on the moss, is so used to her prattle that his eyes close.*)

But, listen, you trees, I have a much more wonderful secret than that. You can have three guesses. It is this . . . I—have—got—a baby! A girl? No thank you. He is two years and nine months, and he says such beautiful things to me about loving me. Oh, rowan, do you think he means them?

SIMON. I distinctly heard it say yes.

(*He opens his eyes, to see her gazing entranced across the water.*)

You needn't pretend that you can see him.

MARY ROSE. I do. Can't you? He is waving his bib to us.

SIMON. That is nurse's cap.

MARY ROSE. Then he is waving it. How clever of him. (*She waves her handkerchief.*) Now they are gone. Isn't it funny to think that from this very spot I used to wave to father? That was a happy time.

SIMON. I should be happier here if I wasn't

so hungry. I wonder where Cameron is. I told him after he landed us to tie up the boat at any good place and make a fire. I suppose I had better try to make it myself.

MARY ROSE. How you can think of food at such a time!

SIMON (*who is collecting sticks*). All very well, but you will presently be eating more than your share.

MARY ROSE. Do you know, Simon, I don't think daddy and mother like this island.

SIMON (*on his guard*). Help me with the fire, you chatterbox.

(*He has long ceased to credit the story he heard four years ago, but he is ever watchful for* MARY ROSE.)

MARY ROSE. They never seem to want to speak of it.

SIMON. Forgotten it, I suppose.

MARY ROSE. I shall write to them from the inn this evening. How surprised they will be to know I am there again.

SIMON (*casually*). I wouldn't write from there. Wait till we cross to the mainland.

MARY ROSE. Why not from there?

SIMON. Oh, no reason. But if they have a distaste for the place, perhaps they wouldn't like our coming. I say, praise me, I have got this fire alight.

MARY ROSE (*who is occasionally pertinacious*). Simon, why did you want to come to my island without me?

SIMON. Did I? Oh, I merely suggested your remaining at the inn because I thought you seemed tired. I wonder where Cameron can have got to.

MARY ROSE. Here he comes. (*Solicitously.*) Do be polite to him, dear; you know how touchy they are.

SIMON. I am learning!

(*The boat, with* CAMERON, *draws in. He is a gawky youth of twenty, in the poor but honourable garb of the ghillie, and is not specially impressive until you question him about the universe.*)

CAMERON (*in the soft voice of the Highlander*). Iss it the wish of Mr. Blake that I should land?

SIMON. Yes, yes, Cameron, with the luncheon.

(CAMERON *steps ashore with the fishing basket.*)

CAMERON. Iss it the wish of Mr. Blake that I open the basket?

SIMON. We shall tumble out the luncheon if you bring a trout or two. I want you to show my wife, Cameron, how one cooks fish by the water's edge.

CAMERON. I will do it with pleasure. (*He pauses.*) There iss one little matter; it iss of small importance. You may haf noticed that I always address you as Mr. Blake. I notice that you always address me as Cameron; I take no offence.

MARY ROSE. Oh dear, I am sure I always address you as Mr. Cameron.

CAMERON. That iss so, ma'am. You may haf noticed that I always address you as 'ma'am.' It iss my way of indicating that I consider you a ferry genteel young matron, and of all such I am the humble servant. (*He pauses.*) In saying I am your humble servant I do not imply that I am not as good as you are. With this brief explanation, ma'am, I will now fetch the trouts.

SIMON (*taking advantage of his departure*). That is one in the eye for me. But I'm hanged if I mister him.

MARY ROSE. Simon, do be careful. If you want to say anything to me that is dangerous, say it in French.

(CAMERON *returns with two small sea-trout.*)

CAMERON. The trouts, ma'am, having been cleaned in a thorough and yet easy manner by pulling them up and down in the water, the next procedure iss as follows.

(*He wraps up the trout in a piece of newspaper and soaks them in the water.*)

I now place the soaking little parcels on the fire, and when the paper begins to burn it will be a sure sign that the trouts iss now ready, like myself, ma'am, to be your humble servants. (*He is returning to the boat.*)

MARY ROSE (*who has been preparing the feast*). Don't go away.

CAMERON. If it iss agreeable to Mistress Blake I would wish to go back to the boat.

MARY ROSE. Why?

(CAMERON *is not comfortable.*)

It would be more agreeable to me if you would stay.

CAMERON (*shuffling*). I will stay.

SIMON. Good man—and look after the trout. It is the most heavenly way of cooking fish, Mary Rose.

CAMERON. It iss a tasty way, Mr. Blake, but I would not use the word heavenly in this connection.

SIMON. I stand corrected. (*Tartly.*) I must say—

MARY ROSE. *Prenez garde, mon brave!*

SIMON. *Mon Dieu! Qu'il est un drôle!*

MARY ROSE. *Mais moi, je l'aime; il est tellement—* What is the French for an original?

SIMON. That stumps me.

CAMERON. Colloquially *coquin* might be used, though the classic writers would probably say simply *un original.*

SIMON (*with a groan*). Phew, this is serious. What was that book you were reading, Cameron, while I was fishing?

CAMERON. It iss a small Euripides I carry in the pocket, Mr. Blake.

SIMON. Latin, Mary Rose!

CAMERON. It may be Latin, but in these parts we know no better than to call it Greek.

SIMON. Crushed again! But I dare say it is good for me. Sit down and have pot-luck with us.

CAMERON. I thank you, Mr. Blake, but it would not be good manners for a paid man to sit with his employers.

MARY ROSE. When I ask you, Mr. Cameron?

CAMERON. It iss kindly meant, but I haf not been introduced to you.

MARY ROSE. Oh, but—oh, do let me. My husband Mr. Blake—Mr. Cameron.

CAMERON. I hope you are ferry well, sir.

SIMON. The same to you, Mr. Cameron. How do you do? Lovely day, isn't it?

CAMERON. It iss a fairly fine day. (*He is not yet appeased.*)

MARY ROSE (*to the rescue*). Simon!

SIMON. Ah! Do you know my wife? Mr. Cameron—Mrs. Blake.

CAMERON. I am ferry pleased to make Mistress Blake's acquaintance. Iss Mistress Blake making a long stay in these parts?

MARY ROSE. No, alas, we go across to-morrow.

CAMERON. I hope the weather will be favourable.

MARY ROSE. Thank you (*passing him the sandwiches*). And now, you know, you are our guest.

CAMERON. I am much obliged. (*He examines the sandwiches with curiosity.*) Butcher-meat! This iss ferry excellent.

(*He bursts into a surprising fit of laughter, and suddenly cuts it off.*)

Please to excuse my behaviour. You haf been laughing at me all this time, but you did not know I haf been laughing at myself also, though keeping a remarkable control over my features. I will now haf my laugh out, and then I will explain. (*He finishes his laugh.*) I will now explain. I am not the solemn prig I haf pretended to you to be, I am really a fairly attractive young man, but I am shy and I haf been guarding against your taking liberties with me, not because of myself, who am nothing, but

because of the noble profession it iss my ambition to enter. (*They discover that they like him.*)

MARY ROSE. Do tell us what that is.

CAMERON. It iss the ministry. I am a student of Aberdeen University, and in the vacation I am a boatman, or a ghillie, or anything you please, to help to pay my fees.

SIMON. Well done!

CAMERON. I am obliged to Mr. Blake. And I may say, now that we know one another socially, that there iss much in Mr. Blake which I am trying to copy.

SIMON. Something in me worth copying!

CAMERON. It iss not Mr. Blake's learning; he has not much learning, but I haf always understood that the English manage without it. What I admire in you iss your ferry nice manners and your general deportment, in all which I haf a great deal to learn yet, and I watch these things in Mr. Blake and take memoranda of them in a little note-book.

(SIMON *expands.*)

MARY ROSE. Mr. Cameron, do tell me that I also am in the little note-book?

CAMERON. You are not, ma'am, it would not be seemly in me. But it iss written in my heart, and also I haf said it to my father, that I will remain a bachelor unless I can marry some lady who iss ferry like Mistress Blake.

MARY ROSE. Simon, you never said anything to me as pretty as that. Is your father a crofter in the village?

CAMERON. Yes, ma'am, when he iss not at the University of Aberdeen.

SIMON. My stars, does he go there too?

CAMERON. He does so. We share a ferry small room between us.

SIMON. Father and son. Is he going into the ministry also?

CAMERON. Such iss not his purpose. When he has taken his degree he will return and be a crofter again.

SIMON. In that case I don't see what he is getting out of it.

CAMERON. He iss getting the grandest thing in the world out of it; he iss getting education.

(SIMON *feels that he is being gradually rubbed out, and it is a relief to him that*

CAMERON *has now to attend to the trout. The paper they are wrapped in has begun to burn.*)

MARY ROSE (*for the first time eating of trout as it should be cooked*). Delicious! (*She offers a portion to* CAMERON.)

CAMERON. No, I thank you. I haf lived on trouts most of my life. This butcher-meat iss more of an excellent novelty to me.

(*He has been standing all this time.*)

MARY ROSE. Do sit down, Mr. Cameron.

CAMERON. I am doing ferry well here, I thank you.

MARY ROSE. But, please.

CAMERON (*with decision*). I will not sit down on this island.

SIMON (*curiously*). Come, come, are you superstitious, you who are going into the ministry?

CAMERON. This island has a bad name. I haf never landed on it before.

MARY ROSE. A bad name, Mr. Cameron? Oh, but what a shame! When I was here long ago, I often came to the island.

CAMERON. Iss that so? It was not a chancey thing to do.

MARY ROSE. But it is a darling island.

CAMERON. That iss the proper way to speak of it.

MARY ROSE. I am sure I never heard a word against it. Have you, Simon?

SIMON (*brazenly*). Not I. I have heard that its Gaelic name has an odd meaning—'The Island that Likes to be Visited,' but there is nothing terrifying in that.

MARY ROSE. The name is new to me, Mr. Cameron. I think it is sweet.

CAMERON. That iss as it may be, Mistress Blake.

SIMON. What is there against the island?

CAMERON. For one thing, they are saying it has no authority to be here. It was not always here, so they are saying. Then one day it was here.

SIMON. That little incident happened before your time I should say, Mr. Cameron.

CAMERON. It happened before the time of any one now alive, Mr. Blake.

SIMON. I thought so. And does the island ever go away for a jaunt in the same way?

CAMERON. There are some who say that it does.

SIMON. But you have not seen it on the move yourself?

CAMERON. I am not always watching it, Mr. Blake.

SIMON. Anything else against it?

CAMERON. There iss the birds. Too many birds come here. The birds like this island more than iss seemly.

SIMON. Birds here! What could bring them here?

CAMERON. It iss said they come to listen.

SIMON. To listen to the silence? An island that is as still as an empty church.

CAMERON. I do not know; that iss what they say.

MARY ROSE. I think it is a lovely story about the birds. I expect the kind things come because this island likes to be visited.

CAMERON. That iss another thing; for, mark you, Mistress Blake, an island that had visitors

would not need to want to be visited—and why has it not visitors? Because they are afraid to visit it.

MARY ROSE. Whatever are they afraid of?

CAMERON. That iss what I say to them. Whateffer are you afraid of, I say.

MARY ROSE. But what are *you* afraid of, Mr. Cameron?

CAMERON. The same thing that they are afraid of. There are stories, ma'am.

MARY ROSE. Do tell us; Simon, wouldn't it be lovely if he would tell us some misty, eerie Highland stories?

SIMON. I don't know; not unless they are pretty ones.

MARY ROSE. Please, Mr. Cameron! I love to have my blood curdled.

CAMERON. There iss many stories. There iss that one of the boy who was brought to this island. He was no older than your baby.

SIMON. What happened to him?

CAMERON. No one knows, Mr. Blake. His father and mother and their friends, they were

gathering rowans on the island, and when they looked round he was gone.

SIMON. Lost?

CAMERON. He could not be found. He was never found.

MARY ROSE. Never! He had fallen into the water?

CAMERON. That iss a good thing to say, that he had fallen into the water. That iss what I say.

SIMON. But you don't believe it?

CAMERON. I do not.

MARY ROSE. What do the people in the village say?

CAMERON. Some say he iss on the island still.

SIMON. Mr. Cameron! Oh, Mr. Cameron! What does your father say?

CAMERON. He will be saying that they are not here always, but that they come and go.

SIMON. They? Who are they?

CAMERON (*uncomfortably*). I do not know.

SIMON. Perhaps he heard what the birds come to listen to!

CAMERON. That iss what they say. He had heard the island calling.

SIMON (*hesitating*). How does the island call?

CAMERON. I do not know.

SIMON. Do you know any one who has heard the call?

CAMERON. I do not. No one can hear it but those for whom it iss meant.

MARY ROSE. But if that child heard it, the others must have heard it also as they were with him.

CAMERON. They heard nothing. This iss how it will be. I might be standing close to you, Mistress Blake, as it were here, and I might hear it, ferry loud, terrible, or in soft whispers—no one knows—but I would haf to go, and you will not haf heard a sound.

MARY ROSE. Simon, isn't it creepy!

SIMON. But full of holes, I have no doubt. How long ago is this supposed to have happened, credulous one?

CAMERON. It was before I was born.

SIMON. I thought so.

MARY ROSE. Simon, don't make fun of my island. Do you know any more ducky stories about it, Mr. Cameron?

CAMERON. I cannot tell them if Mr. Blake will be saying things the island might not like to hear.

SIMON. Not 'chancey,' I suppose.

MARY ROSE. Simon, promise to be good.

SIMON. All right, Cameron.

CAMERON. This one iss about a young English miss, and they say she was about ten years of age.

MARY ROSE. Not so much younger than I was when I came here. How long ago was it?

CAMERON. I think it iss ten years ago this summer.

MARY ROSE. Simon, it must have been the year after I was here!

(SIMON *thinks she has heard enough.*)

SIMON. Very likely. But, I say, we mustn't stay on gossiping. We must be getting back. Did you bail out the boat?

CAMERON. I did not, but I will do it now if such iss your wish.

MARY ROSE. The story first; I won't go without the story.

CAMERON. Well, then, the father of this miss

he will be fond of the fishing, and he sometimes landed the little one on the island while he fished round it from the boat.

MARY ROSE. Just as father used to do with me!

SIMON. I dare say lots of bold tourists come over here.

CAMERON. That iss so, if ignorance be boldness, and sometimes——

SIMON. Quite so. But I really think we must be starting.

MARY ROSE. No, dear. Please go on, Mr. Cameron.

CAMERON. One day the father pulled over for his little one as usual. He saw her from the boat, and it iss said she kissed her hand to him. Then in a moment more he reached the island, but she was gone.

MARY ROSE. Gone?

CAMERON. She had heard the call of the island, though no sound came to him.

MARY ROSE. Doesn't it make one shiver!

CAMERON. My father was one of the searchers; for many days they searched.

MARY ROSE. But it would not take many minutes to search this darling little island.

CAMERON. They searched, ma'am, long after there was no sense in searching.

MARY ROSE. What a curdling story! Simon dear, it might have been Mary Rose. Is there any more?

CAMERON. There iss more. It was about a month afterwards. Her father was walking on the shore, over there, and he saw something moving on the island. All in a tremble, ma'am, he came across in the boat, and it was his little miss.

MARY ROSE. Alive?

CAMERON. Yes, ma'am.

MARY ROSE. I am glad: but it rather spoils the mystery.

SIMON. How, Mary Rose?

MARY ROSE. Because she could tell them what happened, stupid. Whatever was it?

CAMERON. It iss not so easy as that. She did not know that anything had happened. She

thought she had been parted from her father for but an hour.

(MARY ROSE *shivers and takes her husband's hand.*)

SIMON (*speaking more lightly than he is feeling*). You and your bogies and wraiths, you man of the mists.

MARY ROSE (*smiling*). Don't be alarmed, Simon; I was only pretending.

CAMERON. It iss not good to disbelieve the stories when you are in these parts. I believe them all when I am here, though I turn the cold light of remorseless Reason on them when I am in Aberdeen.

SIMON. Is that 'chancey,' my friend? An island that has such extraordinary powers could surely send its call to Aberdeen or farther.

CAMERON (*troubled*). I had not thought of that. That may be ferry true.

SIMON. Beware, Mr. Cameron, lest some day when you are preaching far from here the call plucks you out of the very pulpit and brings you back to the island like a trout on a long cast.

CAMERON. I do not like Mr. Blake's way of talking. I will go and bail the boat.

(*He goes back to the boat, which soon drifts out of sight.*)

MARY ROSE (*pleasantly thrilled*). Suppose it were true, Simon!

SIMON (*stoutly*). But it isn't.

MARY ROSE. No, of course not; but if it had been, how awful for the girl when her father told her that she had been away for weeks.

SIMON. Perhaps she was never told. He may have thought it wiser not to disturb her.

MARY ROSE. Poor girl! Yes, I suppose that would have been best. And yet—it was taking a risk.

SIMON. How?

MARY ROSE. Well, not knowing what had happened before, she might come back and—and be caught again. (*She draws closer to him.*) Little island, I don't think I like you to-day.

SIMON. If she ever comes back, let us hope it is with an able-bodied husband to protect her.

MARY ROSE (*comfortably*). Nice people, husbands. You won't let them catch me, will you, Simon?

SIMON. Let 'em try. (*Gaily.*) And now to pack up the remnants of the feast and escape from the scene of the crime. We will never come back again, Mary Rose, I'm too frightened!

(*She helps him to pack.*)

MARY ROSE. It is a shame to be funny about my island. You poor, lonely isle. I never knew about your liking to be visited, and I dare say I shall never visit you any more. The last time of anything is always sad, don't you think, Simon?

SIMON (*briskly*). There must always be a last time, dearest dear.

MARY ROSE. Yes—I suppose—for everything. There must be a last time I shall see you, Simon. (*Playing with his hair.*) Some day I shall flatten this tuft for the thousandth time, and then never do it again.

SIMON. Some day I shall look for it and it won't be there. That day I shall say 'Good riddance.'

MARY ROSE. I shall cry. (*She is whimsical rather than merry and merry rather than sad.*)

(SIMON *touches her hair with his lips.*)

Some day, Simon, you will kiss me for the last time.

SIMON. That wasn't the last time at any rate. (*To prove it he kisses her again, sportively, little thinking that this may be the last time. She quivers.*) What is it?

MARY ROSE. I don't know; something seemed to pass over me.

SIMON. You and your last times. Let me tell you, Mistress Blake, there will be a last time of seeing your baby. (*Hurriedly.*) I mean only that he can't always be infantile; but the day after you have seen him for the last time as a baby you will see him for the first time as a little gentleman. Think of that.

MARY ROSE (*clapping her hands*). The loveliest time of all will be when he is a man and takes me on his knee instead of my putting him on mine. Oh, gorgeous! (*With one of her sudden changes.*) Don't you think the sad thing is that

we seldom know when the last time has come? We could make so much more of it.

SIMON. Don't you believe that. To know would spoil it all.

(*The packing is nearly completed.*)

I suppose I ought to stamp out the fire?

MARY ROSE. Let Cameron do that. I want you to come and sit beside me, Simon, and make love to me.

SIMON. What a life. Let me see now, how does one begin? Which arm is it? I believe I have forgotten the way.

MARY ROSE. Then I shall make love to you. (*Playing with his hair.*) Have I been a nice wife to you, Simon? I don't mean always and always. There was that awful day when I threw the butter-dish at you. I am so sorry. But have I been a tolerably good wife on the whole, not a wonderful one, but a wife that would pass in a crowd?

SIMON. Look here, if you are going to butt me with your head in that way, you must take that pin out of your hair.

MARY ROSE. Have I been all right as a

mother, Simon? Have I been the sort of mother a child could both love and respect?

SIMON. That is a very awkward question. You must ask that of Harry Morland Blake.

MARY ROSE. Have I——?

SIMON. Shut up, Mary Rose. I know you: you will be crying in a moment, and you don't have a handkerchief, for I wrapped it round the trout whose head came off.

MARY ROSE. At any rate, Simon Blake, say you forgive me about the butter-dish.

SIMON. I am not so sure of that.

MARY ROSE. And there were some other things—almost worse than the butter-dish.

SIMON. I should just say there were.

MARY ROSE. Simon, how can you? There was nothing so bad as that.

SIMON (*shaking his head*). I can smile at it now, but at the time I was a miserable man. I wonder I didn't take to drink.

MARY ROSE. Poor old Simon. But how stupid you were, dear, not to understand.

SIMON. How could an ignorant young husband understand that it was a good

sign when his wife threw the butter-dish at him?

MARY ROSE. You should have guessed.

SIMON. No doubt I was a ninny. But I had always understood that when a young wife—that then she took the husband aside and went red, or white, and hid her head on his bosom, and whispered the rest. I admit I was hoping for that; but all I got was the butter-dish.

MARY ROSE. I suppose different women have different ways.

SIMON. I hope so. (*Severely.*) And that was a dastard trick you played me afterwards.

MARY ROSE. Which? Oh, that! I just wanted you to be out of the way till all was over.

SIMON. I don't mean your getting me out of the house, sending me to Plymouth. The dastardliness was in not letting them tell me, when I got back, that—that he had arrived.

MARY ROSE. It was very naughty of me. You remember, Simon, when you came in to my room you tried to comfort me by saying it wouldn't be long now—and I let you maunder on, you darling.

SIMON. Gazing at me with solemn, innocent eyes. You unutterable brat, Mary Rose!

MARY ROSE. You should have been able to read in my face how clever I had been. Oh, Simon, when I said at last, 'Dearest, what is that funny thing in the bassinette?' and you went and looked, never shall I forget your face.

SIMON. I thought at first it was some baby you had borrowed.

MARY ROSE. I sometimes think so still. I didn't, did I?

SIMON. You are a droll one. Always just when I think I know you at last I have to begin at the beginning again.

MARY ROSE (*suddenly*). Simon, if one of us had to—to go—and we could choose which one——

SIMON (*sighing*). She's off again.

MARY ROSE. Well, but if—I wonder which would be best. I mean for Harry, of course.

SIMON. Oh, I should have to hop it.

MARY ROSE. Dear!

SIMON. Oh, I haven't popped off yet. Steady, you nearly knocked over the pickles. (*He regards her curiously.*) If I did go, I know your

first thought would be 'The happiness of Harry must not be interfered with for a moment.' You would blot me out for ever, Mary Rose, rather than he should lose one of his hundred laughs a day.

(*She hides her face.*)

It's true, isn't it?

MARY ROSE. It is true, at any rate, that if I was the one to go, that is what I should like you to do.

SIMON. Get off the table-cloth.

(*Her mouth opens.*)

Don't step on the marmalade.

MARY ROSE (*gloriously*). Simon, isn't life lovely! I am so happy, happy, happy. Aren't you?

SIMON. Rather.

MARY ROSE. But you can tie up marmalade. Why don't you scream with happiness? One of us has got to scream.

SIMON. Then I know which one it will be. Scream away, it will give Cameron the jumps.

(CAMERON *draws in.*)

There you are, Cameron. We are still safe, you see. You can count us—two.

CAMERON. I am ferry glad.

SIMON. Here you are. (*Handing him the luncheon basket.*) You needn't tie the boat up. Stay there and I'll stamp out the fire myself.

CAMERON. As Mr. Blake pleases.

SIMON. Ready, Mary Rose?

MARY ROSE. I must say good-bye to my island first. Good-bye, old mossy seat, nice rowan. Good-bye, little island that likes too much to be visited. Perhaps I shall come back when I am an old lady with wrinkles, and you won't know your Mary Rose.

SIMON. I say, dear, do dry up. I can't help listening to you when I ought to be getting this fire out.

MARY ROSE. I won't say another word.

SIMON. Just as it seems to be out, sparks come again. Do you think if I were to get some stones——?

(*He looks up and she signs that she has promised not to talk. They laugh to each other. He is then occupied for a little time in dumping wet stones from the loch upon the fire.* CAMERON *is in the boat with his*

Euripides. MARY ROSE *is sitting demure but gay, holding her tongue with her fingers like a child.*

Something else is happening; the call has come to MARY ROSE. *It is at first as soft and furtive as whisperings from holes in the ground, Mary Rose, Mary Rose. Then in a fury as of storm and whistling winds that might be an unholy organ it rushes upon the island, raking every bush for her. These sounds increase rapidly in volume till the mere loudness of them is horrible. They are not without an opponent. Struggling through them, and also calling her name, is to be heard music of an unearthly sweetness that is seeking perhaps to beat them back and put a girdle of safety round her. Once* MARY ROSE'S *arms go out to her husband for help, but thereafter she is oblivious of his existence. Her face is rapt, but there is neither fear nor joy in it. Thus she passes from view. The island immediately resumes its stillness. The sun has gone down.* SIMON *by the*

fire and CAMERON *in the boat have heard nothing.*)

SIMON (*on his knees*). I think the fire is done for at last, and that we can go now. How cold and grey it has become. (*Smiling, but without looking up.*) You needn't grip your tongue any longer, you know. (*He rises.*) Mary Rose, where have you got to? Please don't hide. Dearest, don't. Cameron, where is my wife?

(CAMERON *rises in the boat, and he is afraid to land. His face alarms* SIMON, *who runs this way and that and is lost to sight calling her by name again and again. He returns livid.*)

Cameron, I can't find her. Mary Rose! Mary Rose! Mary Rose!

ACT III

ACT III

Twenty-five years have passed, and the scene is again that cosy room in the Morlands' house, not much changed since we last saw it. If chintzes have faded, others as smiling have taken their place. The time is a crisp autumn afternoon just before twilight comes. The apple-tree, not so easy to renew as the chintzes, has become smaller, but there are a few gallant apples on it. The fire is burning, and round it sit Mr. and Mrs. Morland and Mr. Amy, the Morlands gone smaller like the apple-tree and Mr. Amy bulky, but all three on the whole still bearing their apples. Inwardly they have changed still less; hear them at it as of yore.

MR. MORLAND. What are you laughing over, Fanny?

MRS. MORLAND. It is this week's *Punch*, so very amusing.

MR. AMY. Ah, *Punch*, it isn't what it used to be.

MR. MORLAND. No, indeed.

MRS. MORLAND. I disagree. You two try if you can look at this picture without laughing.

(*They are unable to stand the test.*)

MR. MORLAND. I think I can say that I enjoy a joke as much as ever.

MRS. MORLAND. You light-hearted old man!

MR. MORLAND (*humorously*). Not so old, Fanny. Please to remember that I am two months younger than you.

MRS. MORLAND. How can I forget it when you have been casting it up against me all our married life?

MR. MORLAND (*not without curiosity*). Fanny and I are seventy-three; you are a bit younger, George, I think?

MR. AMY. Oh yes, oh dear, yes.

MR. MORLAND. You never say precisely what your age is.

MR. AMY. I am in the late sixties. I am sure I have told you that before.

MR. MORLAND. It seems to me you have been in the sixties longer than it is usual to be in them.

MRS. MORLAND (*with her needles*). James!

MR. MORLAND. No offence, George, I was only going to say that at seventy-three I certainly don't feel my age. How do you feel, George, at—at sixty-six? (*More loudly, as if* MR. AMY *were a little deaf.*) Do you feel your sixty-six years?

MR. AMY (*testily*). I am more than sixty-six. But I certainly don't feel my age. It was only last winter that I learned to skate.

MR. MORLAND. I still go out with the hounds. You forgot to come last time, George.

MR. AMY. If you are implying anything against my memory, James.

MR. MORLAND (*peering through his glasses*). What do you say?

MR. AMY. I was saying that I have never used glasses in my life.

MR. MORLAND. If I wear glasses occasionally it certainly isn't because there is anything defective in my eyesight. But the type used by newspapers nowadays is so vile——

MR. AMY. There I agree with you. Especially Bradshaw.

MR. MORLAND (*not hearing him*). I say the

type used by newspapers of to-day is vile. Don't you think so?

MR. AMY. I have just said so. (*Pleasantly.*) You are getting rather dull of hearing, James.

MR. MORLAND. I am? I like that, George! Why, I have constantly to shout to you nowadays.

MR. AMY. What annoys me is not that you are a little deaf, you can't help that. But from the nature of your replies I often see that you are pretending to have heard what I said when you did not. That is rather vain, James.

MR. MORLAND. Vain! Now you brought this on yourself, George. I have got something here I might well be vain of, and I meant not to show it to you because it will make you squirm.

(MRS. MORLAND *taps warningly.*)

MR. MORLAND. I didn't mean that, George. I am sure that you will be delighted. What do you think of this?

(*He produces a water-colour which his friend examines at arm's length.*)

Let me hold it out for you as your arms are so short.

(*The offer is declined.*)

MR. AMY (*with a sinking*). Very nice. What do you call it?

MR. MORLAND. Have you any doubt? I haven't the slightest. I am sure that it is an early Turner.

MR. AMY (*paling*). Turner!

MR. MORLAND. What else can it be? Holman suggested a Gurton or even a Dayes. Absurd! Why, Dayes was only a glorified drawing-master. I flatter myself I can't make a mistake about a Turner. There is something about a Turner difficult to define, but unmistakable, an absolute something. It is a charming view, too; Kirkstall Abbey obviously.

MR. AMY. Rivaulx, I am convinced.

MR. MORLAND. I say Kirkstall.

MRS. MORLAND (*with her needles*). James!

MR. MORLAND. Well, you may be right, the place doesn't matter.

MR. AMY. There is an engraving of Rivaulx in that Copperplate Magazine we were looking at. (*He turns up the page.*) I have got it, Rivaulx. (*He brightens.*) Why, this is funny. It is an engraving of that very picture. Hello,

hello, hello. (*Examining it through his private glass.*) And it is signed E. Dayes.

(MR. MORLAND *holds the sketch so close to him that it brushes his eyelashes.*)

I wouldn't eat it, James. So it is by Dayes, the drawing-master, after all. I am sorry you have had this disappointment.

(MRS. MORLAND *taps warningly, but her husband is now possessed.*)

MR. MORLAND. You sixty-six, Mr. Amy, you sixty-six!

MR. AMY. James, this is very painful. Your chagrin I can well understand, but surely your sense of manhood—I regret that I have outstayed my welcome. I bid you good afternoon. Thank you, Mrs. Morland, for your unvarying hospitality.

MRS. MORLAND. I shall see you into your coat, George.

MR. AMY. It is very kind of you, but I need no one to see me into my coat.

MR. MORLAND. You will never see your way into it by yourself.

(*This unworthy remark is perhaps not*

heard, for MRS. MORLAND *succeeds once more in bringing the guest back.*)

MR. AMY. James, I cannot leave this friendly house in wrath.

MR. MORLAND. I am an irascible old beggar, George. What I should do without you——

MR. AMY. Or I without you. Or either of us without that little old dear, to whom we are a never-failing source of mirth.

(*The little old dear curtseys, looking very frail as she does so.*)

Tell Simon when he comes that I shall be in to see him to-morrow. Good-bye, Fanny; I suppose you think of the pair of us as in our second childhood?

MRS. MORLAND. Not your second, George. I have never known any men who have quite passed their first.

(*He goes smiling.*)

MR. MORLAND (*ruminating by the fire*). He is a good fellow, George, but how touchy he is about his age. And he has a way of tottering off to sleep while one is talking to him.

MRS. MORLAND. He is not the only one of us who does that.

(*She is standing by the window.*)

MR. MORLAND. What are you thinking about, Fanny?

MRS. MORLAND. I was thinking about the apple-tree, and that you have given the order for its destruction.

MR. MORLAND. It must come down. It is becoming a danger, might fall on some one down there any day.

MRS. MORLAND. I quite see that it has to go. (*She can speak of* MARY ROSE *without a tremor now.*) But her tree! How often she made it a ladder from this room to the ground.

(MR. MORLAND *does not ask who, but he very nearly does so.*)

MR. MORLAND. Oh yes, of course. Did she use to climb the apple-tree? Yes, I think she did.

(*He goes to his wife, as it were for protection.*)

MRS. MORLAND (*not failing him*). Had you forgotten that also, James?

MR. MORLAND. I am afraid I forget a lot of things.

MRS. MORLAND. Just as well.

MR. MORLAND. It is so long since she—how long is it, Fanny?

MRS. MORLAND. Twenty-five years, a third of our lifetime. It will soon be dark; I can see the twilight running across the fields. Draw the curtains, dear.

(*He does so and turns on the lights; they are electric lights now.*)

Simon's train must be nearly due, is it not?

MR. MORLAND. In ten minutes or so. Did you forward his telegram?

MRS. MORLAND. No, I thought he would probably get it sooner if I kept it here.

MR. MORLAND. I dare say. (*He joins her on the sofa, and she sees that he is troubled.*)

MRS. MORLAND. What is it, dear?

MR. MORLAND. I am afraid I was rather thoughtless about the apple-tree, Fanny. I hurt you.

MRS. MORLAND (*brightly*). Such nonsense. Have another pipe, James.

MR. MORLAND (*doggedly*). I will not have another pipe. I hereby undertake to give up

smoking for a week as a punishment to myself. (*His breast swells a little.*)

MRS. MORLAND. You will regret this, you know.

MR. MORLAND (*his breast ceasing to swell*). Why is my heart not broken? If I had been a man of real feeling it would have broken twenty-five years ago, just as yours did.

MRS. MORLAND. Mine didn't, dear.

MR. MORLAND. In a way it did. As for me, at the time I thought I could never raise my head again, but there is a deal of the old Adam in me still. I ride and shoot and laugh and give pompous decisions on the bench and wrangle with old George as if nothing much had happened to me. I never think of the island now; I daresay I could go back there and fish. (*He finds that despite his outburst his hand has strayed towards his tobacco-pouch.*) See what I am doing! (*He casts his pouch aside as if it were the culprit.*) I am a man enamoured of myself. Why, I have actually been considering, Fanny, whether I should have another dress suit.

MRS. MORLAND (*picking up the pouch*). And why shouldn't you?

MR. MORLAND. At my age! Fanny, this should be put on my tombstone: 'In spite of some adversity he remained a lively old blade to the end.'

MRS. MORLAND. Perhaps that would be a rather creditable epitaph for any man, James, who has gone through as much as you have. What better encouragement to the young than to be able to tell them that happiness keeps breaking through? (*She puts the pipe, which she has been filling, in his mouth.*)

MR. MORLAND. If I smoke, Fanny, I shall despise myself more than ever.

MRS. MORLAND. To please me.

MR. MORLAND (*as she holds the light*). I don't feel easy about it, not at all easy. (*With a happy thought.*) At any rate, I won't get the dress suit.

MRS. MORLAND. Your dress suit is shining like a mirror.

MR. MORLAND. Isn't it! I thought of a jacket suit only. The V-shaped waistcoat seems to be what they are all wearing now.

MRS. MORLAND. Would you have braid on the trousers?

MR. MORLAND. I was wondering. You see—Oh, Fanny, you are just humouring me.

MRS. MORLAND. Not at all. And as for the old Adam in you, dear Adam, there is still something of the old Eve in me. Our trip to Switzerland two years ago with Simon, I enjoyed every hour of it. The little card parties here, am I not called the noisy one; think of the girls I have chaperoned and teased and laughed with, just as if I had never had a girl myself.

MR. MORLAND. Your brightness hasn't been all pretence?

MRS. MORLAND. No, indeed; I have passed through the valley of the shadow, dear, but I can say thankfully that I have come out again into the sunlight. (*A little tremulously.*) I suppose it is all to the good that as the years go by the dead should recede farther from us.

MR. MORLAND. Some say they don't.

MRS. MORLAND. You and I know better, James.

MR. MORLAND. Up there in the misty

Hebrides I dare say they think of her as on the island still. Fanny, how long is it since—since you half thought *that* yourself?

MRS. MORLAND. Ever so many years. Perhaps not the first year. I did cling for a time——

MR. MORLAND. The neighbours here didn't like it.

MRS. MORLAND. She wasn't their Mary Rose, you see.

MR. MORLAND. And yet her first disappearance——

MRS. MORLAND. It is all unfathomable. It is as if Mary Rose was just something beautiful that you and I and Simon had dreamt together. You have forgotten much, but so have I. Even that room—(*she looks towards the little door*)—that was hers and her child's during all her short married life—I often go into it now without remembering that it was theirs.

MR. MORLAND. It is strange. It is rather terrible. You are pretty nigh forgotten, Mary Rose.

MRS. MORLAND. That isn't true, dear. Mary Rose belongs to the past, and we have to live in

the present, for a very little longer. Just a little longer, and then we shall understand all. Even if we could drag her back to tell us now what these things mean I think it would be a shame.

MR. MORLAND. Yes, I suppose so. Do you think Simon is a philosopher about it also?

MRS. MORLAND. Don't be bitter, James, to your old wife. Simon was very fond of her. He was a true lover.

MR. MORLAND. Was, was! Is it all 'was' about Mary Rose?

MRS. MORLAND. It just has to be. He had all the clever ones of the day advising, suggesting, probing. He went back to the island every year for a long time.

MR. MORLAND. Yes, and then he missed a year, and that somehow ended it.

MRS. MORLAND. He never married again. Most men would.

MR. MORLAND. His work took her place. What a jolly, hearty fellow he is.

MRS. MORLAND. If you mean he isn't heart-broken, he isn't. Mercifully the wound has healed.

MR. MORLAND. I am not criticising, Fanny. I suppose any one who came back after twenty-five years—however much they had been loved—it might—we—should we know what to say to them, Fanny?

MRS. MORLAND. Don't, James. (*She rises.*) Simon is late, isn't he?

MR. MORLAND. Very little. I heard the train a short time ago, and he might be here—just—if he had the luck to find a cab. But not if he is walking across the fields.

MRS. MORLAND. Listen!

MR. MORLAND. Yes, wheels. That is probably Simon. He had got a cab.

MRS. MORLAND. I do hope he won't laugh at me for having lit a fire in his room.

MR. MORLAND (*with masculine humour*). I hope you put him out some bed-socks.

MRS. MORLAND (*eagerly*). Do you think he would let me? You wretch!

(*She hurries out and returns in* SIMON'S *arms.*

He is in a greatcoat and mufti. He looks his years, grizzled with grey hair and not

very much of it, and the tuft is gone. He is heavier and more commanding, full of vigour, a rollicking sea-dog for the moment, but it is a face that could be stern to harshness.)

SIMON (*saluting*). Come aboard, sir.

MRS. MORLAND. Let me down, you great bear. You know how I hate to be rumpled.

MR. MORLAND. Not she, loves it. Always did. Get off your greatcoat, Simon. Down with it anywhere.

MRS. MORLAND (*fussing delightedly*). How cold your hands are. Come nearer to the fire.

MR. MORLAND. He is looking fit, though.

SIMON. We need to be fit—these days.

MRS. MORLAND. So nice to have you again. You do like duck, don't you? The train was late, wasn't it?

SIMON. A few minutes only. I made a selfish bolt for the one cab, and got it.

MR. MORLAND. We thought you might be walking across the fields.

SIMON. No, I left the fields to the two other people who got out of the train. One of

them was a lady; I thought something about her walk was familiar to me, but it was darkish, and I didn't make her out.

MRS. MORLAND. Bertha Colinton, I expect. She was in London to-day.

SIMON. If I had thought it was Mrs. Colinton I would have offered her a lift. (*For a moment he gleams boyishly like the young husband of other days.*) Mother, I have news; I have got the *Bellerophon*, honest Injun!

MRS. MORLAND. The very ship you wanted.

SIMON. Rather.

MR. MORLAND. Bravo, Simon.

SIMON. It is like realising the ambition of one's life. I'm one of the lucky folk, I admit.

(*He says this, and neither of them notices it as a strange remark.*)

MR. MORLAND (*twinkling*). Beastly life, a sailor's.

SIMON (*cordially*). Beastly. I have loathed it ever since I slept in the old *Britannia*, with my feet out at the port-hole to give them air. We all slept that way; must have been a pretty sight from the water. Oh, a beast of a life, but

I wouldn't exchange it for any other in the world. (*Lowering.*) And if this war does come——

MR. MORLAND (*characteristically*). It won't, I'm sure.

SIMON. I dare say not. But they say—however.

MRS. MORLAND. Simon, I had forgotten. There is a telegram for you.

SIMON. Avaunt! I do trust it is not recalling me. I had hoped for at least five clear days.

MRS. MORLAND (*giving it to him*). We didn't open it.

SIMON. Two to one it is recalling me.

MRS. MORLAND. It came two days ago. I don't like them, Simon, never did; they have broken so many hearts.

SIMON. They have made many a heart glad too. It may be from my Harry—at last. Mother, do you think I was sometimes a bit harsh to him?

MRS. MORLAND. I think you sometimes were, my son.

MR. MORLAND. Open it, Simon.

(SIMON *opens the telegram and many unseen devils steal into the room.*)

MRS. MORLAND (*shrinking from his face*). It can't be so bad as that. We are all here, Simon.

(*For a moment he has not been here himself, he has been on an island. He is a good son to* MRS. MORLAND *now, thinking of her only, placing her on the sofa, going on his knees beside her and stroking her kind face. Her arms go out to her husband, who has been reading the telegram.*)

MR. MORLAND (*dazed*). Can't be, can't be!

SIMON (*like some better father than he perhaps has been*). It is all right, Mother. Don't you be afraid. It is good news. You are a brave one, you have come through much, you will be brave for another minute, won't you?

(*She nods, with a frightened smile.*)

Mother dear, it is Mary Rose.

MR. MORLAND. It can't be true. It is too—too glorious to be true.

MRS. MORLAND. Glorious? Is my Mary Rose alive?

SIMON. It is all right, all right. I wouldn't say it, surely, if it wasn't true. Mary Rose

has come back. The telegram is from Cameron. You remember who he was. He is minister there now. Hold my hand, and I'll read it. 'Your wife has come back. She was found to-day on the island. I am bringing her to you. She is quite well, but you will all have to be very careful.'

MRS. MORLAND. Simon, can it be?

SIMON. I believe it absolutely. Cameron would not deceive me.

MR. MORLAND. He might be deceived himself; he was a mere acquaintance.

SIMON. I am sure it is true. He knew her by sight as well as any of us.

MR. MORLAND. But after twenty-five years!

SIMON. Do you think I wouldn't know her after twenty-five years?

MRS. MORLAND. My—my—she will be—very changed.

SIMON. However changed, Mother, wouldn't I know my Mary Rose at once! Her hair may be as grey as mine—her face—her little figure—her pretty ways—though they were all gone, don't you think I would know Mary Rose at

once? *(He is suddenly stricken with a painful thought.)* Oh, my God, I saw her, and I didn't know her!

MRS. MORLAND. Simon!

SIMON. It had been Cameron with her. They must have come in my train. Mother, it was she I saw going across the fields—her little walk when she was excited, half a run, I recognised it, but I didn't remember it was hers.

(Those unseen devils chuckle.)

MR. MORLAND. It was getting dark.

SIMON *(slowly)*. Mary Rose is coming across the fields.

(He goes out. MORLAND *peers weakly through the window curtains.* MRS. MORLAND *goes on her knees to pray.)*

MR. MORLAND. It is rather dark. I I shouldn't wonder though there was a touch of frost to-night. I wish I was more use.

*(*CAMERON *enters, a bearded clergyman now.)*

MRS. MORLAND. Mr. Cameron? Tell us quickly, Mr. Cameron, is it true?

CAMERON. It iss true, ma'am. Mr. Blake met us at the gate and he iss with her now. I

hurried on to tell you the things necessary. It iss good for her you should know them at once.

MRS. MORLAND. Please, quick.

CAMERON. You must be prepared to find her—different.

MRS. MORLAND. We are all different. Her age——

CAMERON. I mean, Mrs. Morland, different from what you expect. She iss not different as we are different. They will be saying she iss just as she was on the day she went away.

(MRS. MORLAND *shrinks.*)

These five-and-twenty years, she will be thinking they were just an hour in which Mr. Blake and I had left her in some incomprehensible jest.

MRS. MORLAND. James, just as it was before!

MR. MORLAND. But when you told her the truth?

CAMERON. She will not have it.

MRS. MORLAND. She must have seen how much older you are.

CAMERON. She does not know me, ma'am, as the boy who was with her that day. When she

did not recognize me I thought it best—she was so troubled already—not to tell her.

MR. MORLAND (*appealing*). But now that she has seen Simon. His appearance, his grey hair—when she saw him she would know.

CAMERON (*unhappy*). I am not sure; it iss dark out there.

MR. MORLAND. She must have known that he would never have left her and come home.

CAMERON. That secretly troubles her, but she will not speak of it. There iss some terrible dread lying on her heart.

MR. MORLAND. A dread?

MRS. MORLAND. Harry. James, if she should think that Harry is still a child!

CAMERON. I never heard what became of the boy.

MRS. MORLAND. He ran away to sea when he was twelve years old. We had a few letters from Australia, very few; we don't know where he is now.

MR. MORLAND. How was she found, Mr. Cameron?

CAMERON. Two men fishing from a boat saw

her. She was asleep by the shore at the very spot where Mr. Blake made a fire so long ago. There was a rowan-tree beside it. At first they were afraid to land, but they did. They said there was such a joy on her face as she slept that it was a shame to waken her.

MR. MORLAND. Joy?

CAMERON. That iss so, sir. I have sometimes thought——

(*There is a gleeful clattering on the stairs of some one to whom they must be familiar; and if her father and mother have doubted they know now before they see her that* MARY ROSE *has come back. She enters. She is just as we saw her last except that we cannot see her quite so clearly. She is leaping towards her mother in the old impulsive way and the mother responds in her way, but something steps between them.*)

MARY ROSE (*puzzled*). What is it?

(*It is the years.*)

MRS. MORLAND. My love.

MR. MORLAND. Mary Rose.

MARY ROSE. Father.

(*But the obstacle is still there. She turns timidly to* SIMON, *who has come in with her.*)

What is it, Simon?

(*She goes confidently to him till she sees what the years have done with him. She shakes now.*)

SIMON. My beloved wife.

(*He takes her in his arms and so does her mother, and she is glad to be there, but it is not of them she is thinking, and soon she softly disengages herself.*)

MR. MORLAND. We are so glad you—had you a comfortable journey, Mary Rose? You would like a cup of tea, wouldn't you? Is there anything *I* can do?

(MARY ROSE'S *eyes go from him to the little door at the back.*)

MARY ROSE (*coaxingly to her father*). Tell me.

MR. MORLAND. Tell you what, dear?

MARY ROSE (*appealing to* CAMERON). You?

(*He presses her hand and turns away. She*

goes to SIMON *and makes much of him, cajoling him.*)

Simon, my Simon. Be nice to me, Simon. Be nice to me, dear Simon, and tell me.

SIMON. Dearest love, since I lost you—it was a long time ago——

MARY ROSE (*petulant*). It wasn't—please, it wasn't. (*She goes to her mother.*) Tell me, my mother dear.

MR. MORLAND. I don't know what she wants to be told.

MRS. MORLAND. I know.

MARY ROSE (*an unhappy child*). Where is my baby?

(*They cannot face her, and she goes to seek an answer from the room that lies beyond the little door. Her mother and husband follow her.*

MR. MORLAND *and* CAMERON *left alone are very conscious of what may be going on in that inner room.*)

MR. MORLAND. Have you been in this part of the country before, Mr. Cameron?

CAMERON. I haf not, sir. It iss my first

visit to England. You cannot hear the sea in this house at all, which iss very strange to me.

MR. MORLAND. If I might show you our Downs——

CAMERON. I thank you, Mr. Morland, but—in such circumstances do not trouble about me at all.

(*They listen.*)

MR. MORLAND. I do not know if you are interested in prints. I have a pencil sketch by Cousins—undoubtedly genuine——

CAMERON. I regret my ignorance on the subject. This matter, so strange—so inexplicable——

MR. MORLAND. Please don't talk of it to me, sir. I am—an old man. I have been so occupied all my life with little things—very pleasant—I cannot cope—cannot cope——

(*A hand is placed on his shoulder so sympathetically that he dares to ask a question.*)

Do you think she should have come back, Mr. Cameron?

(*The stage darkens and they are blotted out. Into this darkness* MRS. OTERY *enters with a candle and we see that the scene has changed to the dismantled room of the first act.* HARRY *is sunk in the chair as we last saw him.*)

MRS. OTERY (*who in her other hand has a large cup and saucer*). Here is your tea, mister. Are you sitting in the dark? I haven't been more than the ten minutes I promised you. I was——

(*She stops short, struck by his appearance. She holds the candle nearer him. He is staring wide-eyed into the fire, motionless.*)

What is the matter, mister? Here is the tea, mister.

(*He looks at her blankly.*)

I have brought you a cup of tea, I have just been the ten minutes.

HARRY. (*rising*). Wait a mo.

(*He looks about him, like one taking his bearings.*)

Gimme the tea. That's better. Thank you, missis.

MRS. OTERY. Have you seen anything?

HARRY. See here, as I sat in that chair—I wasn't sleeping, mind you—it's no dream—but things of the far past connected with this old house—things I knew naught of—they came crowding out of their holes and gathered round me till I saw—I saw them all so clear that I don't know what to think, woman. (*He is a grave man now.*) Never mind about that. Tell me about this—ghost.

MRS. OTERY. It's no concern of yours.

HARRY. Yes, it is some concern of mine. The folk that used to live here—the Morlands——

MRS. OTERY. That was the name. I suppose you heard it in the village?

HARRY. I have heard it all my days. It is one of the names I bear. I am one of the family.

MRS. OTERY. I suspicioned that.

HARRY. I suppose that is what made them come to me as I sat here. Tell me about them.

MRS. OTERY. It is little I know. They were dead and gone before my time, the old man and his wife.

HARRY. It's not them I am asking you about.

MRS. OTERY. They had a son-in-law, a sailor.

The war made a great man of him before it drowned him.

HARRY. I know that; he was my father. Hard I used to think him, but I know better now. Go on, there's the other one.

MRS. OTERY (*reluctantly*). That was all.

HARRY. There is one more.

MRS. OTERY. If you must speak of her, she is dead too. I never saw her in life.

HARRY. Where is she buried?

MRS. OTERY. Down by the church.

HARRY. Is there a stone?

MRS. OTERY. Yes.

HARRY. Does it say her age?

MRS. OTERY. No.

HARRY. Is that holy spot well taken care of?

MRS. OTERY. You can see for yourself.

HARRY. I will see for myself. And so it is her ghost that haunts this house?

(*She makes no answer. He struggles with himself.*)

There is no such thing as ghosts. And yet—Is it true about folk having lived in this house and left in a hurry?

MRS. OTERY. It's true.

HARRY. Because of a ghost—a thing that can't be.

MRS. OTERY. When I came in your eyes were staring; I thought you had seen her.

HARRY. Have you ever seen her yourself?

(*She shivers.*)

Where? In this room?

(*She looks at the little door.*)

In there? Has she ever been seen out of that room?

MRS. OTERY. All over the house, in every room and on the stairs. I tell you I've met her on the stairs, and she drew back to let me pass and said 'Good evening' too, timid-like, and at another time she has gone by me like a rush of wind.

HARRY. What is she like? Is she dressed in white? They are allus dressed in white, aren't they?

MRS. OTERY. She looks just like you or me. But for all that she's as light as air. I've seen—things.

HARRY. You look like it, too. But she is harmless it seems?

MRS. OTERY. There's some wouldn't say that; them that left in a hurry. If she thought you were keeping it from her she would do you a mischief.

HARRY. Keeping what from her?

MRS. OTERY. Whatever it is she prowls about this cold house searching for, searching, searching. I don't know what it is.

HARRY (*grimly*). Maybe I could tell you. I dare say I could even put her in the way of finding him.

MRS. OTERY. Then I wish to God you would, and let her rest.

HARRY. My old dear, there are worse things than not finding what you are looking for; there is finding them so different from what you had hoped. (*He moves about.*) A ghost. Oh no—and yet, and yet— See here, I am going into that room.

MRS. OTERY. As you like; I care not.

HARRY. I'll burst open the door.

MRS. OTERY. No need; it's not locked; I cheated you about that.

HARRY. But I tried it and it wouldn't open.

(MRS. OTERY *is very unhappy.*)

You think she is in there?

MRS. OTERY. She may be.

HARRY (*taking a deep breath*). Give me air.

(*He throws open the window and we see that it is a night of stars.*)

Leave me here now. I have a call to make.

MRS. OTERY (*hesitating*). I dunno. You think you're in no danger, but——

HARRY. That is how it is to be, missis. Just ten minutes you were out of the room, did you say?

MRS. OTERY. That was all.

HARRY. God!

(*She leaves him. After a moment's irresolution he sets off upon his quest carrying the candle, which takes with it all the light of the room. He is visible on the other side of the darkness, in the little passage and opening the door beyond. He returns, and now we see the pale ghost of* MARY ROSE *standing in the middle of the room, as if made out of the light he has brought back with him.*)

MARY ROSE (*bowing to him timidly*). Have you come to buy the house?

HARRY (*more startled by his own voice than by hers*). Not me.

MARY ROSE. It is a very nice house. (*Doubtfully.*) Isn't it?

HARRY. It was a nice house once.

MARY ROSE (*pleased*). Wasn't it! (*Suspiciously.*) Did you know this house?

HARRY. When I was a young shaver.

MARY ROSE. Young? Was it you who laughed?

HARRY. When was that?

MARY ROSE (*puzzled*). There was once some one who laughed in this house. Don't you think laughter is a very pretty sound?

HARRY (*out of his depths*). Is it? I dare say. I never thought about it.

MARY ROSE. You are quite old.

HARRY. I'm getting on.

MARY ROSE (*confidentially*). Would you mind telling me why every one is so old? I don't know you, do I?

HARRY. I wonder. Take a look. You might

have seen me in the old days—playing about—outside in the garden—or even inside.

MARY ROSE. You—you are not Simon, are you?

HARRY. No. (*Venturing.*) My name is Harry.

MARY ROSE (*stiffening*). *I* don't think so. I strongly object to your saying that.

HARRY. I'm a queer sort of cove, and I would like to hear you call me Harry.

MARY ROSE (*firmly*). I decline. I regret, but I absolutely decline.

HARRY. No offence.

MARY ROSE. I think you are sorry for me.

HARRY. I am that.

MARY ROSE. I am sorry for me, too.

HARRY (*desperately desirous to help her*). If only there was something I— I know nothing about ghosts—not a thing; can they sit down? Could you——?

(*He turns the chair toward her.*)

MARY ROSE. That is your chair.

HARRY. What do you mean by that?

MARY ROSE. That is where you were sitting.

HARRY. Were you in this room when I was sitting there?

MARY ROSE. I came in to look at you.

(*A sudden thought makes him cross with the candle to where he had left his knife. It is gone.*)

HARRY. Where is my knife? Were you standing looking at me with my knife in your hand?

(*She is sullenly silent.*)

Give me my knife.

(*She gives it to him.*)

What made you take it?

MARY ROSE. I thought you were perhaps the one.

HARRY. The one?

MARY ROSE. The one who stole him from me.

HARRY. I see. Godsake, in a sort of way I suppose I am.

(*He sits in the chair.*)

MARY ROSE. Give him back to me.

HARRY. I wish I could. But I'm doubting he is gone beyond recall.

MARY ROSE (*unexpectedly*). Who is he?

HARRY. Do you mean you have forgotten who it is you are searching for?

MARY ROSE. I knew once. It is such a long time ago. I am so tired; please can I go away and play now?

HARRY. Go away? Where? You mean back to that—that place?

(*She nods.*)

What sort of a place is it? Is it good to be there?

MARY ROSE. Lovely, lovely, lovely.

HARRY. It's not just the island, is it, that's so lovely, lovely?

(*She is perplexed.*)

Have you forgotten the island too?

MARY ROSE. I am sorry.

HARRY. The island, the place where you heard the call.

MARY ROSE. What is that?

HARRY. You have even forgotten the call! With vision as far as I can make out, it was as if, in a way, there were two kinds of dogs out hunting you—the good and the bad.

MARY ROSE (*who thinks he is chiding her*). Please don't be cross with me.

HARRY. I am far from cross with you. I

begin to think it was the good dogs that got you. Are they ghosts in that place?

MARY ROSE (*with surprising certainty*). No.

HARRY. You are sure?

MARY ROSE. Honest Injun.

HARRY. What fairly does me is, if the place is so lovely, what made you leave it?

MARY ROSE (*frightened*). I don't know.

HARRY. Do you think you could have fallen out?

MARY ROSE. I don't know. (*She thinks his power is great.*) Please, I don't want to be a ghost any more.

HARRY. As far as I can see, if you wasn't a ghost there you made yourself one by coming back. But it's no use your expecting me to be able to help you. (*She droops at this and he holds out his arms.*) Come to me, ghostie; I wish you would.

MARY ROSE (*prim again*). Certainly not.

HARRY. If you come, I'll try to help you.

(*She goes at once and sits on his knee.*)

See here, when I was sitting by the fire alone I seemed to hear you as you once were saying

that some day when he was a man you would like to sit on your Harry's knee.

MARY ROSE (*vaguely quoting she knows not whom*). The loveliest time of all will be when he is a man and takes me on his knee instead of my taking him on mine.

HARRY. Do you see who I am now?

MARY ROSE. Nice man.

HARRY. Is that all you know about me?

MARY ROSE. Yes.

HARRY. There is a name I would like to call you by, but my best course is not to worry you. Poor soul, I wonder if there was ever a man with a ghost on his knee before.

MARY ROSE. I don't know.

HARRY. Seems to me you're feared of being a ghost. I dare say, to a timid thing, being a ghost is worse than seeing them.

MARY ROSE. Yes.

HARRY. Is it lonely being a ghost?

MARY ROSE. Yes.

HARRY. Do you know any other ghosts?

MARY ROSE. No.

HARRY. Would you like to know other ghosts?

MARY ROSE. Yes.

HARRY. I can understand that. And now you would like to go away and play?

MARY ROSE. Please.

HARRY. In this cold house, when you should be searching, do you sometimes play by yourself instead?

MARY ROSE (*whispering*). Don't tell.

HARRY. Not me. You're a pretty thing. What beautiful shoes you have.

(*She holds out her feet complacently.*)

MARY ROSE. Nice buckles.

HARRY. I like your hair.

MARY ROSE. Pretty hair.

HARRY. Do you mind the tuft that used to stand up at the back of—of Simon's head?

MARY ROSE (*merrily*). Naughty tuft.

HARRY. I have one like that.

MARY ROSE (*smoothing it down*). Oh dear, oh dear, what a naughty tuft.

HARRY. My name is Harry.

MARY ROSE (*liking the pretty sound*). Harry, Harry, Harry, Harry.

HARRY. But you don't know what Harry I am.

MARY ROSE. No.

HARRY. And this brings us no nearer what's to be done with you. I would willingly stay here though I have my clearing in Australy, but you're just a ghost. They say there are ways of laying ghosts, but I am so ignorant.

MARY ROSE (*imploringly*). Tell me.

HARRY. I wish I could; you are even more ignorant than I am.

MARY ROSE. Tell me.

HARRY. All I know about them for certain is that they are unhappy because they can't find something, and then once they've got the thing they want, they go away happy and never come back.

MARY ROSE. Oh, nice.

HARRY. The one thing clear to me is that you have got that thing at last, but you are too dog-tired to know or care. What you need now is to get back to the place you say is lovely, lovely.

MARY ROSE. Yes, yes.

HARRY. It sounds as if it might be Heaven, or near thereby.

(*She wants him to find out for her.*)

Queer, you that know so much can tell nothing, and them that know nothing can tell so much. If there was any way of getting you to that glory place!

MARY ROSE. Tell me.

HARRY (*desperate*). He would surely send for you, if He wanted you.

MARY ROSE (*crushed*). Yes.

HARRY. It's like as if He had forgotten you.

MARY ROSE. Yes.

HARRY. It's as if nobody wanted you, either there or here.

MARY ROSE. Yes. (*She rises.*) Bad man.

HARRY. It's easy to call me names, but the thing fair beats me. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you, but a mere man is so helpless. How should the likes of me know what to do with a ghost that has lost her way on earth? I wonder if what it means is that you broke some law, just to come back for the sake of—of that Harry? If it was that, it's surely time He overlooked it.

MARY ROSE. Yes.

(*He looks at the open window.*)

HARRY. What a night of stars! Good old glitterers, I dare say they are in the know, but I am thinking you are too small a thing to get a helping hand from them.

MARY ROSE. Yes.

(*The call is again heard, but there is in it now no unholy sound. It is a celestial music that is calling for Mary Rose, Mary Rose, first in whispers and soon so loudly that, for one who can hear, it is the only sound in the world. Mary Rose, Mary Rose. As it wraps her round, the weary little ghost knows that her long day is done. Her face is shining. The smallest star shoots down as if it were her star sent for her, and with her arms stretched forth to it trustingly she walks out through the window into the empyrean. The music passes with her.* HARRY *hears nothing, but he knows that somehow a prayer has been answered.*)